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WAGING NONVIOLENT STRUGGLE

20th Century Practice and 21st Century Potential

Author: Gene Sharp

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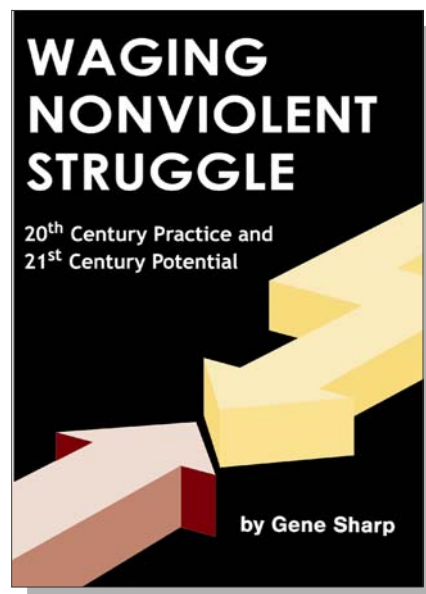
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Selected Publications in English by the Author

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Full listing of publications

Dr. Sharp is the author of dozens of additional publications, including articles, pamphlets, chapters, and books, in English and translations. His writings have been published in over thirty languages. For the most recent listing see the Albert Einstein Institution website: www.aeinstein.org

WAGING NONVIOLENT STRUGGLE

20th Century Practice and 21st Century Potential

by Gene Sharp

with the collaboration of Joshua Paulson
and the assistance of Christopher A. Miller
and Hardy Merriman



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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

LEARNING FROM A CENTURY OF NONVIOLENT STRUGGLES

An alternative type of power

Although we live in a world of many grave problems, oppression, and violence, we also live in a world of much good and great potential for a better future. While we are unable to transform this world overnight, we can take important steps to change it, to solve its problems, lift its oppression, and minimize the many applications of violence.

Violence shapes our societies in many ways, through wars, dictatorships, social oppression, genocide, political assassinations, and terrorism. However, violence in organized and institutionalized forms is not used only for purposes that are widely recognized to be “bad.” Violence is also employed to oppose those purposes and in favor of causes believed to be “good.” Although problems are often recognized in these “good” uses of violence, it is widely believed that there is no realistic alternative.

As we enter the twenty-first century, it is beginning to be more widely understood that there is in fact an alternative. This alternative is not a simple moral injunction against the use of violence. This alternative is a means of struggle to apply power in acute conflicts. It is called nonviolent struggle.

In the past, this technique has often been poorly understood, and frequently it has been misrepresented. However, on the basis of past improvised applications, it has often served as a realistic alternative to the use of violence. This has been especially important in conflicts where serious issues have been at stake and violence was threatened or applied for unacceptable purposes. Today, if understood accurately and applied intelligently, wisely, and courageously, this alternative type of struggle in fact offers great hope for a better future for our world.

The Parts of this book

This book is organized into four Parts. Part One is introductory. It explains what nonviolent struggle is and offers crucial insights into political power. The sources of political power, as well as the potential to sever those sources, are explored. Those chapters open the way for consideration of noncooperation, the technique of nonviolent action, and its many methods.

Part Two contains 23 cases of the application of nonviolent struggle in the twentieth century. These cases have often been more successful than is usually recognized, even in extreme situations. Part Three of this book examines the dynamics of how this technique operates. Ways in which wise strategies can be developed are presented in Part Four. A major contention of this final Part is that future nonviolent conflicts can now be made more effective than the improvised struggles of the past by means of careful preparations, and especially by strategic planning. If groups facing serious conflicts find the guidelines for strategic planning presented in Part Four to be useful, this could be significant.

The accounts in Part Two of the 23 cases of applications of nonviolent struggle in the twentieth century are intended to be factual and purely descriptive. Most of these have been researched and drafted by persons other than myself, as stated in the Acknowledgements. The cases have been identified by the type of action employed, not on the basis of moral or doctrinal criteria. The simple act of bringing together these descriptive accounts corrects some of the widespread misconceptions of this type of struggle. These misconceptions are mentioned in Chapter Twenty-eight on "Assessing These Diverse Cases."

As is explained in that chapter, the described cases in Part Two are, unfortunately, not representative of all cases of nonviolent struggle, or even of the cases of the twentieth century. Due to the historical neglect of past applications of this alternative technique, there is no comprehensive record from which representative cases could be selected. Nonetheless, the cases presented in this book are still highly significant.

A few of them are known to be important and simply had to be included. These include Russia 1905, Germany 1920, India 1930-31, the North-West Frontier Province 1930-1934, Norway 1942, Czechoslovakia 1968, Poland 1980-1989, Burma 1988-1990, China 1989, the Soviet Union 1991, Thailand 1992, and Serbia 2000.

Some other cases are here partly because I knew the researchers. These include Berlin 1943, Guatemala 1944, France 1961, Namibia 1971-1972, and Latvia 1991. Other cases are here in part because I personally learned something about the case by being present in the country not long after the events (as in Norway 1942 and Serbia 2000), or, even during them (as in China 1989 and Latvia 1991). In one case, a colleague argued for the importance of the case and knew the sources of information (the U.S. grape workers' strikes and boycotts 1965-1970). The issue of representativeness is further discussed in Chapter Twenty-eight.

The aim of this book

The aim of this book is to advance knowledge and understanding of the technique of nonviolent struggle and its potential. It does this by offering information and new insights and interpreting their significance. The ways nonviolent struggle operates are complex and variable. No two cases of the use of this technique are identical.

It is hoped that *Waging Nonviolent Struggle* will be useful to diverse individuals and groups that seek more knowledge and understanding of this alternative to both passivity and violence. My intent in writing this volume was to make a significant scholarly contribution to the deliberate refinement and development of nonviolent struggle. This is especially true of the role of strategic planning in increasing its effectiveness. Also, I hope this book will stimulate serious investigation of the potential of nonviolent struggle if applied in conflicts in which violence had been considered the only realistic option.

A growth of understanding

This book was not born fully developed. My serious studies of this phenomenon began in 1949. My master's thesis in sociology at Ohio State University in 1951 opened my exploration of this field. However, conclusions presented in this volume were reached slowly and incrementally, as a result of more than fifty years of study, observation, and reflection about the practice of nonviolent struggle and thought about its relevance and potential in a world of major violence used for political purposes. Some of my earlier perceptions about nonviolent action have over the years been modified, enriched, rejected and even reversed.

A careful study of M. K. Gandhi's thinking on power, strategy, and nonviolent struggle was exceptionally important and continues to influence my insights into this type of conflict. Equal or greater influence, however, has come from learning more about the practice of pragmatic nonviolent struggle in other parts of the world, especially Europe.

My studies of political theory while at St. Catherine's College, Oxford, focusing heavily on political power, authority, and political obligation, were extremely enriching. So, too, were the studies of totalitarianism, including the Nazi system.

Major parts of conclusions from my studies of power and nonviolent struggle were contained in my 1973 book *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, which can be beneficially studied along with this volume. This volume does not replace that book, but instead, builds on and expands it. This is especially true of the topic of strategic planning, which was merely introduced in that earlier book.

Robert Helvey, a retired U.S. Army colonel, stimulated both thinking about strategic planning and effective consulting about the potential of nonviolent struggle among groups that were committed at the time to using violent resistance. Other contacts with military officers and institutions from several countries were also useful.

Reading books on military strategy, as by Carl von Clausewitz and Sir Basil Liddell Hart, were also important, as

were personal conversations with Sir Basil at his home in the early 1960s.

Reality against extreme violence

Much additionally has been learned by attempts to grapple with issues related to how nonviolent struggle can be applied practically in facing extreme situations. These situations included its possible role against foreign aggression and coups d'état by civilian-based defense planning from the early 1960s. Later, attention was required to the potential and problems of incorporating a nonviolent resistance component into a predominantly military defense policy, as in Sweden, Norway, and Lithuania in the 1980s and 1990s.

My understanding of the requirements for effective anti-dictatorship struggles arose not only from anti-Nazi resistance movements, but also from meeting with Burmese opposition groups on the Thai-Burma border areas and in Thailand in the 1990s. I met with Panamanian democrats protesting against Noriega in 1987. I met with students and opposition leaders in Beijing in parts of May and June 1989, and was in Tiananmen Square as the troops first entered. I also met with ministers of the independence-minded governments of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania as they were struggling to secede from the Soviet Union in 1991. Brutal political reality can focus the mind on the difficulties of applying nonviolent struggle against extreme dictatorships.

One thing that is clear from these experiences is that nonviolent struggle has operated in situations of much violence and often in societies where at least some of the nonviolent resisters had great faith in the power and necessity of violence, although they still chose and effectively used nonviolent struggle.

It is also clear that nonviolent struggle is an important part of political reality. It has often been belittled or ignored by persons, movements, or governments that “know” that the “real” power derives from violence. However, nonviolent struggle is another very powerful form of force.

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Of course, this book is only one contribution among the many studies that are needed in developing this alternative to both passivity and violence. Much new work is merited into the potential of nonviolent struggle in applications against political oppression as well as in undermining extreme economic and social oppression, and blocking attempts to perpetrate genocide.

It is my hope that this book offers some significant information, understanding, and ideas that will facilitate the consideration of a realistic alternative. We need to press forward with this exploration.

Chapter One

FACING ACUTE CONFLICTS

All conflicts are not equal

We live in a world of many conflicts, and we have a responsibility to face many of them.

Not all conflicts are equal. Some are much more important than others, and in some conflicts the issues at stake are more difficult to resolve in acceptable ways than are those in other conflicts.

Where the issues are of only limited importance, the difficulties in reaching a resolution are often small. Potentially, we can split the difference, agree on a third option, or postpone dealing with some issues until a later time. Even in these lesser conflicts, however, the group with a grievance requires effective means of pressing its claims. Otherwise, there is little reason for one's opponents to consider those claims seriously.

There are, however, many other conflicts in which fundamental issues are, or are believed to be, at stake. These con-

flicts are not deemed suitable for resolution by any methods that involve compromise. These are “acute conflicts.”

Waging acute conflicts

In acute conflicts, at least one side regards it as necessary and good to wage the conflict against hostile opponents because of the issues seen to be at stake. It is often believed that the conflict must be waged in order to advance or protect freedom, justice, religion, one's civilization, or one's people. Proposed settlements that involve basic compromises of these fundamental issues are rarely acceptable. Likewise, submission to the opponents, or defeat by them, is regarded as disastrous. Yet, compromise or submission is often believed to be required for peaceful solutions to acute conflicts. Since these are not acceptable options for the parties involved, people therefore believe that it is necessary to wage the conflict by applying the strongest means available to them. These means often involve some type of violence.

There are alternatives

Violence, however, is not the only possibility. War and other forms of violence have not been universal in the waging of acute conflicts. In a great variety of situations, across centuries and cultural barriers, another technique of struggle has at times been applied. This other technique has been based on the ability to be stubborn, to refuse to cooperate, to disobey, and to resist powerful opponents powerfully.

Throughout human history, and in a multitude of conflicts, one side has instead fought by psychological, social, economic, or political methods, or a combination of them. Many times this alternative technique of struggle has been applied when fundamental issues have been at stake, and when ruthless opponents have been willing and able to apply extreme repression. This repression has included beatings, arrests, imprisonments, executions, and mass slaughters. Despite such repression, when the resisters have persisted in fighting with

only their chosen “nonviolent weapons,” they have sometimes triumphed.

This alternative technique is called nonviolent action or nonviolent struggle. This is “the other ultimate sanction.” In some acute conflicts it has served as an alternative to violent struggle.

In the minds of many people, nonviolent struggle is closely connected with the persons of Mohandas K. Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The work and actions of both men and the movements that they led or in which they played crucial roles are highly important. However, those movements are by no means representative of all nonviolent action. In fact, the work of these men is in significant ways atypical of the general practice of nonviolent struggle during recent decades and certainly throughout the centuries. Nonviolent struggles are not new historically. They have occurred for many centuries, although historical accounts frequently give them little recognition.

Widespread nonviolent struggle

Nonviolent struggle has occurred in widely differing cultures, periods of history, and political conditions. It has occurred in the West and in the East. Nonviolent action has occurred in industrialized and nonindustrialized countries. It has been practiced under constitutional democracies and against empires, foreign occupations, and dictatorial systems. Nonviolent struggle has been waged on behalf of a myriad of causes and groups, and even for objectives that many people reject. It has also been used to prevent, as well as to promote, change. Its use has sometimes been mixed with limited violence, but many times it has been waged with minimal or no violence.

The issues at stake in these conflicts have been diverse. They have included social, economic, ethnic, religious, national, humanitarian, and political matters, and they have ranged from the trivial to the fundamental.

Although historians have generally neglected this type of struggle, it is clearly a very old phenomenon. Most of the history of this technique has doubtless been lost, and most of what has survived has been largely ignored.

Many cases of the use of nonviolent action have had little or nothing to do with governments. Modern cases include labor-management conflicts and efforts to impose or resist pressures for social conformity. Nonviolent action has also been used in ethnic and religious conflicts and many other situations, such as disputes between students and university administrations. Important conflicts between the civilian population and governments where one side has employed nonviolent action have also occurred very widely. The following examples are often of this type.

Cases of nonviolent struggle

From the late eighteenth century through the twentieth century, the technique of nonviolent action was widely used in colonial rebellions, international political and economic conflicts, religious conflicts, and anti-slavery resistance.¹ This technique has been aimed to secure workers' right to organize, women's rights, universal manhood suffrage, and woman suffrage. This type of struggle has been used to gain national independence, to generate economic gains, to resist genocide, to undermine dictatorships, to gain civil rights, to end segregation, and to resist foreign occupations and coups d'état.

In the twentieth century, nonviolent action rose to unprecedented political significance throughout the world. People using this technique amassed major achievements, and, of course, experienced failure at times. Higher wages and improved working conditions were won. Oppressive traditions and practices were abolished. Both men and women won the right to vote in several countries in part by using this tech-

¹ For bibliographic references to books in English on many of these cases, see Ronald M. McCarthy and Gene Sharp, with the assistance of Brad Bennett, *Nonviolent Action: A Research Guide*, New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1997.

nique. Government policies were changed, laws repealed, new legislation enacted, and governmental reforms instituted. Invaders were frustrated and armies defeated. An empire was paralyzed, coups d'état thwarted, and dictatorships disintegrated. Nonviolent struggle was used against extreme dictatorships, including both Nazi and Communist systems.

Cases of the use of this technique early in the twentieth century included major elements of the Russian 1905 Revolution. In various countries growing trade unions widely used the strike and the economic boycott. Chinese boycotts of Japanese products occurred in 1908, 1915, and 1919. Germans used nonviolent resistance against the Kapp *Putsch* in 1920 and against the French and Belgian occupation of the Ruhr in 1923. In the 1920s and 1930s, Indian nationalists used nonviolent action in their struggles against British rule, under the leadership of Mohandas K. Gandhi. Likewise, Muslim Pashtuns in what was the North-West Frontier Province of British India (now in Pakistan) also used nonviolent struggle against British rule under the leadership of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan.

From 1940 to 1945 people in various European countries, especially in Norway, Denmark, and The Netherlands, used nonviolent struggle to resist Nazi occupation and rule. Nonviolent action was used to save Jews from the Holocaust in Berlin, Bulgaria, Denmark, and elsewhere. The military dictators of El Salvador and Guatemala were ousted in brief nonviolent struggles in the spring of 1944. The American civil rights nonviolent struggles against racial segregation, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, changed laws and long-established policies in the U.S. South. In April 1961, noncooperation by French conscript soldiers in the French colony of Algeria, combined with popular demonstrations in France and defiance by the Debré-de Gaulle government, defeated the military coup d'état in Algiers before a related coup in Paris could be launched.

In 1968 and 1969, following the Warsaw Pact invasion, Czechs and Slovaks held off full Soviet control for eight months with improvised nonviolent struggle and refusal of

collaboration. From 1953 to 1991, dissidents in Communist-ruled countries in Eastern Europe, especially in East Germany, Poland, Hungary, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, repeatedly used nonviolent struggles for increased freedom. The Solidarity struggle in Poland began in 1980 with strikes to support the demand of a legal free trade union, and concluded in 1989 with the end of the Polish Communist regime. Nonviolent protests and mass resistance were also highly important in undermining the apartheid policies and European domination in South Africa, especially between 1950 and 1990. The Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines was destroyed by a nonviolent uprising in 1986.

In July and August 1988, Burmese democrats protested against the military dictatorship with marches and defiance and brought down three governments, but this struggle finally succumbed to a new military coup d'état and mass slaughter. In 1989, Chinese students and others in over three hundred cities (including Tiananmen Square, Beijing) conducted symbolic protests against government corruption and oppression, but the protests finally ended following massive killings by the military.

Nonviolent struggle brought about the end of Communist dictatorships in Poland and Czechoslovakia in 1989 and in East Germany, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in 1991. Non-cooperation and defiance against the attempted "hard line" coup d'état by the KGB, the Communist Party, and the Soviet Army in 1991, blocked the attempted seizure of the Soviet State.

In Kosovo, the Albanian population between 1990 and 1999 conducted a widespread noncooperation campaign against repressive Serbian rule. When the de facto Kosovo government lacked a nonviolent strategy for gaining de jure independence, a guerrilla Kosovo Liberation Army initiated violence. This was followed by extreme Serbian repression and massive slaughters by so-called ethnic cleansing, which led to NATO bombing and intervention.

Starting in November 1996, Serbs conducted daily parades and protests in Belgrade and other cities against the autocratic

governance of President Milosevic and secured correction of electoral fraud in mid-January 1997. At that time, however, Serb democrats lacked a strategy to press the struggle further and failed to launch a campaign to bring down the Milosevic dictatorship. In early October 2000, the Otpor (Resistance) movement and other democrats rose up again against Milosevic in a carefully planned nonviolent struggle and the dictatorship collapsed.

In early 2001, President Estrada, who had been accused of corruption, was ousted by Filipinos in a “People Power Two” campaign.

There were many other important examples this past century, and the practice of nonviolent struggle continues.

The many methods of nonviolent struggle

A multitude of specific methods of nonviolent action, or nonviolent weapons, exist. Nearly two hundred have been identified to date, and without doubt, scores more already exist and others will emerge in future conflicts. These methods are detailed in Chapter Four.

Methods of nonviolent action include protest marches, flying forbidden flags, massive rallies, vigils, leaflets, picketing, social boycotts, economic boycotts, labor strikes, rejection of legitimacy, civil disobedience, boycott of government positions, boycott of rigged elections, strikes by civil servants, noncooperation by police, nonobedience without direct supervision, mutiny, sit-ins, hunger strikes, sit-downs on the streets, establishment of alternative institutions, occupation of offices, and creation of parallel governments.

These methods may be used to protest symbolically, to put an end to cooperation, or to disrupt the operation of the established system. As such, three broad classes of nonviolent methods exist: *nonviolent protest and persuasion*, *noncooperation*, and *nonviolent intervention*.

Symbolic protests, though in most situations quite mild, can make it clear that some of the population is opposed to the present regime and can help to undermine its legitimacy.

Social, economic, and political noncooperation, when practiced strongly and long enough, can weaken the opponents' control, wealth, domination, and power, and potentially produce paralysis. The methods of nonviolent intervention, which disrupt the established order by psychological, social, economic, physical, or political methods, can dramatically threaten the opponents' control.

Individuals and groups may hold differing opinions about the general political usefulness and the ethical acceptability of the methods of nonviolent struggle. Yet everyone can benefit from more knowledge and understanding of their use and careful examination of their potential relevance and effectiveness.

A pragmatic choice

Nonviolent struggle is identified by what people do, not by what they believe. In many cases, the people using these nonviolent methods have believed violence to be perfectly justified in moral or religious terms. However, for the specific conflict that they currently faced they chose, for pragmatic reasons, to use methods that did not include violence.

Only in rare historical instances did a group or a leader have a personal belief that rejected violence in principle. Nevertheless, even in these cases, a nonviolent struggle based on pragmatic concerns was often still viewed as morally superior.

However, belief that violence violates a moral or religious principle does not constitute nonviolent action.² Nor does the simple absence of physical violence mean that nonviolent action is occurring. It is the type of activity that identifies the technique of nonviolent action, not the belief behind the activity.

The degree to which nonviolent struggle has been consciously chosen in place of violence differs widely among historical examples. In many past cases, nonviolent action

² It is worth noting that some believers in "principled nonviolence" have even *rejected* nonviolent struggle because it was a way to wage conflict (in which they did not believe).

appears to have been initiated more or less spontaneously, with little deliberation. In other cases, the choice of a certain nonviolent method—such as a labor strike—was made on grounds specific to the particular situation only, without a comparative evaluation of the merits of nonviolent action over violent action. Many applications of nonviolent action seem to have been imitations of actions elsewhere.

There has been much variation in the degree to which people in these conflicts have been aware of the existence of a general nonviolent technique of action and have had prior knowledge of its operation.

In most of these cases, nonviolent means appear to have been chosen because of considerations of anticipated effectiveness. In some cases, there appear to have been mixed motives, with practical motives predominating but with a relative moral preference for nonviolent means.

What words to use?

The type of action in these cases and others has been given various names, some of which are useful and others of which are inappropriate. These names include “nonviolent resistance,” “civil resistance,” “passive resistance,” “nonviolence,” “people power,” “political defiance,” and “positive action.” The use of the term “nonviolence” is especially unfortunate, because it confuses these forms of mass action with beliefs in ethical or religious nonviolence (“principled nonviolence”). Those beliefs, which have their merits, are different phenomena that usually are unrelated to mass struggles conducted by people who do not share such beliefs. To identify the technique, we here use and recommend the terms *nonviolent action* or *nonviolent struggle*.

Because of the continuing imprecision and confusion about which words to use, it has been necessary over recent decades to refine existing terminology to describe and discuss such action, and even to develop new words and phrases. Therefore, a short glossary has been included for reference at the end of this book.

Exposing misconceptions

In addition to misconceptions conveyed by unfortunate terminology, there are other areas of confusion in the field of nonviolent struggle as well. Despite new studies in recent decades, inaccuracies and misunderstandings are still widespread. Here are corrections for some of them:

(1) Nonviolent action has nothing to do with passivity, submissiveness, or cowardice. Just as in violent action, these must first be rejected and overcome before the struggle can proceed.

(2) Nonviolent action is a means of conducting conflicts and can be very powerful, but it is an extremely different phenomenon from violence of all types.

(3) Nonviolent action is not to be equated with verbal persuasion or purely psychological influences, although this technique may sometimes include action to apply psychological pressures for attitude change. Nonviolent action is a technique of struggle involving the use of psychological, social, economic, and political power in the matching of forces in conflict.

(4) Nonviolent action does not depend on the assumption that people are inherently "good." The potentialities of people for both "good" and "evil" are recognized, including the extremes of cruelty and inhumanity.

(5) In order to use nonviolent action effectively, people do *not* have to be pacifists or saints. Nonviolent action has been predominantly and successfully practiced by "ordinary" people.

(6) Success with nonviolent action does not require (though it may be helped by) shared standards and principles, or a high degree of shared interests or feelings of psychological closeness between the contending sides. If the opponents are emotionally unmoved by nonviolent resistance in face of violent repression, and therefore unwilling to agree to the objectives of the nonviolent struggle group, the resisters may apply coercive nonviolent measures. Difficult enforcement problems, economic losses, and political paralysis do not require the opponents' agreement to be felt.

(7) Nonviolent action is at least as much of a Western phenomenon as an Eastern one. Indeed, it is probably more Western, if one takes into account the widespread use of strikes and economic boycotts in the labor movements, the noncooperation struggles of subordinated European nationalities, and the struggles against dictatorships.

(8) In nonviolent action, there is no assumption that the opponents will refrain from using violence against nonviolent resisters. In fact, the technique is capable of operating against violence.

(9) There is nothing in nonviolent action to prevent it from being used for both “good” and “bad” causes. However, the social consequences of its use for a “bad” cause differ considerably from the consequences of violence used for the same “bad” cause.

(10) Nonviolent action is not limited to domestic conflicts within a democratic system. In order to have a chance of success, it is *not* necessary that the struggle be waged against relatively gentle and restrained opponents. Nonviolent struggle has been widely used against powerful governments, foreign occupiers, despotic regimes, tyrannical governments, empires, ruthless dictatorships, and totalitarian systems. These difficult nonviolent struggles against violent opponents have sometimes been successful.

(11) One of the many widely believed myths about conflict is that violence works quickly, and nonviolent struggle takes a long time to bring results. This is *not* true. Some wars and other violent struggles have been fought for many years, even decades. Some nonviolent struggles have brought victories very quickly, even within days or weeks. The time taken to achieve victory with this technique depends on diverse factors—including the strength of the nonviolent resisters and the wisdom of their actions.

What about human nature?

Despite the widespread occurrence of this type of conflict, many people still assume that nonviolent struggle is contrary

to "human nature." It is often claimed that its widespread practice would require either a fundamental change in human beings or the acceptance of a powerful new religious or ideological belief system. Those views are not supported by the reality of past conflicts that have been waged by use of this technique.

In fact, the practice of this type of struggle is not based on belief in "turning the other cheek" or loving one's enemies. Instead, the widespread practice of this technique is more often based on the undeniable capacity of human beings to be stubborn, and to do what they want to do or to refuse to do what they are ordered, whatever their beliefs about the use or nonuse of violence. Massive stubbornness can have powerful political consequences.

In any case, the view that nonviolent struggle is impossible except under rare conditions is contrary to the facts. That which has happened in the past is possible in the future.

The extremely widespread practice of nonviolent struggle is possible because the operation of this technique is compatible with the nature of political power and the vulnerabilities of all hierarchical systems. These systems and all governments depend on the subordinated populations, groups, and institutions to supply them with their needed sources of power. Before continuing with the examination of the technique of nonviolent struggle, it is therefore necessary to explore in greater depth the nature of the power of dominant institutions and all governments. This analysis sheds light on how it is that nonviolent struggle can be effective against repressive and ruthless regimes. They are vulnerable.

Chapter Three

AN ACTIVE TECHNIQUE OF STRUGGLE

A simple insight

Nonviolent action, or nonviolent struggle, is a technique of action by which the population can restrict and sever the sources of power of their rulers or other oppressors and mobilize their own power potential into effective power. This technique is based on the understanding of political power presented in the previous chapter.

That understanding showed that the power of rulers and of hierarchical systems, no matter how dictatorial, depends directly on the obedience and cooperation of the population. Such obedience and cooperation, in turn, depend on the willingness of the population and a multitude of assistants to

For fuller analysis of nonviolent struggle and the thinking in this chapter, see Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973.

consent by their actions or inaction to support the rulers. People may obey and cooperate because they positively approve of the rulers or their orders, or they may obey and cooperate because they are intimidated into submission by the fear of punishment.

Yet, despite such punishments, acts of protest, disobedience, and noncooperation have occurred frequently in many societies. Sometimes, these have been of major significance, as noted in Chapter One.

Nonviolent struggle does not require acceptance of a new political doctrine or of a new moral or religious belief. In political terms, nonviolent action is based on a very simple insight: people do not always do what they are told to do, and sometimes they do things that they have been forbidden to do. Subjects may disobey laws they reject. Workers may halt work, which may paralyze the economy. The bureaucracy may refuse to carry out instructions. Soldiers and police may become lax in inflicting repression or even mutiny. When all these events happen simultaneously, the power of the rulers weakens and can dissolve.

The technique of nonviolent struggle has been applied against a wide variety of opponents. The term "opponents" is used here to refer to the adversary, whether a group, institution, regime, invader, or, rarely, an individual, against whom nonviolent struggle is being waged. Usually, the most difficult of these conflicts are those against the current rulers of the State or groups that have State backing. However, the technique is also applicable in conflicts against less formidable opponents. The issues in these conflicts vary from case to case. They may include not only political but also social, economic, religious, and cultural ones.

When people repudiate their opponents' authority, refuse cooperation, withhold assistance, and persist in disobedience and defiance, they are denying to their opponents the basic human assistance and cooperation that any government or hierarchical system requires. If the opponents are highly dependent on such assistance, and if the resisters refuse cooperation and disobey in sufficient numbers for enough

time and persist despite repression, the persons who have been the “rulers” or dominant elite become just another group of people. This is the basic political assumption of this type of struggle.

A way to wage conflict

Nonviolent action is a generic term covering dozens of specific methods of *protest*, *noncooperation* and *intervention*. In all of these, the resisters conduct the conflict by doing—or refusing to do—certain acts by means other than physical violence.

Nonviolent action may involve acts of *omission*—that is, people may refuse to perform acts that they usually perform, are expected by custom to perform, or are required by law or regulation to perform. Or, people may commit acts of *commission*—that is, people may perform acts that they do not usually perform, are not expected by custom to perform, or are forbidden to perform. Or, this type of struggle may include a *combination* of acts of omission and commission. In no way is the technique of nonviolent action passive. It is action that is nonviolent.

Although nonviolent means of conducting conflicts have been widely used in the past, they have not been well understood, or they have been confused with other phenomena. This misunderstanding and confusion have often reduced the effectiveness of attempts to use this technique. This has thereby benefited the opponents against whose regime or policies the struggle was directed. If this type of struggle is falsely identified with weakness and passivity, confused with pacifism, lumped with rioting or guerrilla warfare, or viewed as a type of action that does not require careful preparations, then nonviolent struggle may not even be attempted, or, if it is, the effort may well be ineffective.

Classes of methods of action

At least 198 specific methods of nonviolent struggle have been identified. These constitute three main types of activity.

The first large class is called nonviolent protest and persuasion. These are forms of activity in which the practitioners are expressing opinions by symbolic actions, to show their support or disapproval of an action, a policy, a group, or a government, for example. Many specific methods of action fall into this category. These include written declarations, petitions, leafleting, picketing, wearing of symbols, symbolic sounds, vigils, singing, marches, mock funerals, protest meetings, silence, and turning one's back, among many others. In many political situations these methods are quite mild, but under a highly repressive regime such actions may be dramatic challenges and require great courage.

The second class of methods is noncooperation, an extremely large class, which may take social, economic, and political forms. In these methods, the people refuse to continue usual forms of cooperation or to initiate new cooperation. The effect of such noncooperation by its nature is more disruptive of the established relationships and the operating system than are the methods of nonviolent protest and persuasion. The extent of that disruption depends on the system within which the action occurs, the importance of the activity in which people are refusing to engage, the specific type of noncooperation used, which groups are refusing cooperation, how many people are involved, and how long the noncooperation can continue.

The methods of social noncooperation include, among others, social boycott, excommunication, student strike, stay-at-home, and collective disappearance.

The forms of economic noncooperation are grouped under (1) economic boycotts and (2) labor strikes. The methods of economic boycott include, among others, consumers' boycotts, rent withholding, refusal to let or sell property, lock outs, withdrawal of bank deposits, revenue refusals, and international trade embargoes. Labor strikes include: protest strikes, prisoners' strikes, slowdown strikes, general strikes, and economic shutdowns, as well as many others.

Political noncooperation is a much larger subclass. It includes withholding or withdrawal of allegiance, boycotts of

elections, boycotts of government employment or positions, refusal to dissolve existing institutions, reluctant and slow compliance, disguised disobedience, civil disobedience, judicial noncooperation, deliberate inefficiency, and selective noncooperation by enforcement agents, noncooperation by constituent government units, and severance of diplomatic relations.

The methods of nonviolent intervention all actively disrupt the normal operation of policies or the system by deliberate interference, either psychologically, physically, socially, economically, or politically. Among the large number of methods in this class are the fast, sit-ins, nonviolent raids, nonviolent obstruction, nonviolent occupation, the overloading of facilities, alternative social institutions, alternative communication systems, reverse strikes, stay-in strikes, nonviolent land seizures, defiance of blockades, seizures of assets, selective patronage, alternative economic institutions, the overloading of administrative systems, the seeking of imprisonment, and dual sovereignty and parallel government.

These and many additional similar methods of nonviolent protest and persuasion, noncooperation, and nonviolent intervention constitute the technique of nonviolent action.

Success has requirements

Nonviolent struggle does not work through magic. Although nonviolent resisters have succeeded many times, they have not done so every time, and certainly not without cost. The simple choice to conduct a conflict by nonviolent action does not guarantee success.

Many past struggles were only partially successful. Sometimes a victory was short-lived because people did not use it well to consolidate their gains, nor did they effectively resist new threats to their liberties. In other cases, victory in a single campaign won concessions, but new struggles were still required to gain the full objectives. Nevertheless, in some cases, major victories were achieved that many people would have expected to be impossible through nonviolent resistance.

However, some of the past cases of nonviolent struggles failed to accomplish their objectives. Such failure has occurred for a variety of reasons. If the resisters are weak, if the specific methods used are poorly chosen, or if the resisters become frightened and intimidated into submission, then they are unlikely to win. If the resisters lack a strategy by which to wage the struggle with maximum effectiveness, their chances of succeeding are greatly diminished. There is no substitute for genuine strength and wise action in the conduct of nonviolent struggle.

Participating in a nonviolent struggle does not make an individual immune from imprisonment, injury, suffering, or death. As in violent conflicts, the participants often suffer harsh penalties for their defiance and noncooperation. Yet, victories by nonviolent struggle with few casualties, and even none, also have occurred, and commonly the casualties in nonviolent struggles are significantly fewer than those in comparable violent struggles for similar objectives.

Much greater consideration of this technique will assist us in assessing its potential relevance and potential effectiveness. Let us, therefore, survey the operation of nonviolent struggle.

Uses and effects of nonviolent struggle

Nonviolent struggle can be employed as a substitute for violence against other groups in one's society, against groups in another society, against one's own government, or against another government.

Many times, only the methods of nonviolent protest and persuasion may be used in attempts to influence opinions of the opponents and others. Such actions may affect the moral authority or legitimacy of the opponents. However, these methods are the weaker ones.

Many of the methods of noncooperation are much more powerful because they can potentially reduce or sever the supply of the opponents' sources of power. These methods require significant numbers of participants and usually the

participation of groups and institutions in the refusal of cooperation.

The methods of nonviolent intervention may be applied by groups of various sizes. Some of the methods—as a sit-in in an office—require fewer numbers of participants to make a major impact than do methods of noncooperation. In the short run at least, these methods are generally more disruptive of the status quo than noncooperation. However, some of these methods may often be met with extreme repression. In order to make their impact, the resisters must be prepared to withstand this, while persisting in their nonviolent defiance. Unless the numbers of participants are extremely large—as in massive sit-downs on central city streets—it may not be possible to maintain the application of these methods for long periods of time. Casualties may be severe.

It is very important that those who plan to engage in a nonviolent struggle choose the methods they will use with extreme care. The methods chosen should strike at the opponents' vulnerabilities, utilize the resisters' strengths, and be used in combination with other methods in ways that are mutually supportive. To be most effective, the methods will also need to be chosen and implemented in accordance with a grand strategy for the overall struggle. The grand strategy needs to be developed before the specific methods are selected. The development of grand strategies and strategies for limited campaigns will be discussed in Part Four.

The effects of the use of the diverse methods of nonviolent action vary widely. Such effects depend on the nature of the system within which they are applied, the type of the opponents' regime, the extent of their application, the normal roles in the operation of the system of the persons and groups applying them, the skill of the groups in using nonviolent action, the presence or absence of the use of wise strategies in the conflict, and, finally, the relative ability of the nonviolent resisters to withstand repression from the opponents and to persist in their noncooperation and defiance without falling into violence.

Repression and mechanisms of change

Since these methods of nonviolent action, especially those of noncooperation, often directly disturb or disrupt the supply of the needed sources of power and “normal” operations, the opponents are likely to respond strongly, usually with repression. This repression can include beatings, arrests, imprisonments, executions, and mass slaughters. Despite repression, the resisters have at times persisted in fighting with only their chosen nonviolent weapons.

Past struggles have only rarely been well planned and prepared and have usually lacked a strategic plan. Resistance was often poorly focused, and the resisters often did not know what they should or should not do. Consequently, it is not surprising that, in the face of serious repression, nonviolent struggles have at times produced only limited positive results or have even resulted in clear defeats and disasters. Yet, amazingly, many improvised nonviolent struggles have triumphed. There is now reason to believe that the effectiveness of this technique can be greatly increased with improved understanding of the requirements of this technique, and with development of strategic planning.

When nonviolent struggles succeed in achieving their declared objectives, the result is produced by the operation of one of four mechanisms—conversion, accommodation, nonviolent coercion, or disintegration—or a combination of two or three of them. Rarely, the opponents have a change of view; that is, a conversion takes place. In this case, as a result of the nonviolent persistence and the willingness of the people to continue despite suffering, harsh conditions, and brutalities perpetrated on them, the opponents decide that it is right to accept the claims of the nonviolent group. Although religious pacifists frequently stress this possibility, it does not occur often.

A much more common mechanism is called accommodation. This essentially means that both sides compromise on issues and receive, and give up, a part of their original objectives. This can operate only in respect to issues on which each side can compromise without seeing themselves to be

violating their fundamental beliefs or political principles. Accommodation occurs in almost all labor strike settlements. The final agreed working conditions and wages are usually somewhere between the originally stated objectives of the two sides. One must remember that these settlements are highly influenced by how much power each side can wield in waging the conflict.

In other conflicts, the numbers of resisters have become so large, and the parts of the social and political order they influence or control are so essential, that the noncooperation and defiance have taken control of the conflict situation. The opponents are still in their former positions, but they are unable any longer to control the system without the resumption of cooperation and submission by the resisters. Not even repression is effective, either because of the massiveness of the noncooperation or because the opponents' troops and police no longer reliably obey orders. The change is made against the opponents' will, because the supply of their needed sources of power has been seriously weakened or severed. The opponents can no longer wield power contrary to the wishes of the nonviolent struggle group. This is nonviolent coercion.

This is what occurred, for example, in the Russian 1905 Revolution. As a result of the Great October Strike, Tsar Nicholas II issued the constitutional manifesto of October 17, 1905, which granted a *Duma* or legislature, thereby abandoning his claim to be sole autocrat.

In more extreme situations, the noncooperation and defiance are so vast and strong that the previous regime simply falls apart. There is no one left with sufficient power even to surrender.

In Russia in February 1917, the numbers of strikers were massive; all social classes had turned against the tsarist regime; huge peaceful street demonstrations were undermining the loyalty of the soldiers; and troop reinforcements dissolved into the protesting crowds. Finally, Tsar Nicholas II, facing this reality, quietly abdicated, and the tsarist government was "dissolved and swept away." This is disintegration.

In Serbia in October 2000, the Otpor-initiated defiance and noncooperation campaign met almost all the characteristics of the disintegration campaign, with one notable exception. Milosevic had clearly lost his power capacity and faced nonviolent coercion. However, he retained enough power to go on television to capitulate. He had suddenly discovered that, contrary to earlier claims, his electoral rival Vojislav Kostunica had actually won the election and Milosevic had not. He had only enough remaining power to claim television time to surrender. This was almost disintegration. This mechanism, however, remains a rare ending of nonviolent struggles.

Additional elements of nonviolent struggle

While noncooperation to undermine compliance and to weaken and sever the sources of the opponents' power are the main forces in nonviolent struggle, one other process sometimes operates. This is "political ju-jitsu." In this process, brutal repression against disciplined nonviolent resisters does not strengthen the opponents and weaken the resisters, but does the opposite.

Widespread revulsion against the opponents for their brutality operates in some cases to shift power to the resisters. More people may join the resistance. Third parties may change their opinions and activities to favor the resisters and act against the opponents. Even members of the opponents' usual supporters, administrators, and troops and police may become unreliable and may even mutiny. The use of the opponents' supposedly coercive violence has then been turned to undermine their own power capacity. Political ju-jitsu does not operate in all situations, however, and instead heavy reliance must therefore be placed on the impact of large scale, carefully focussed noncooperation.

The importance of strategy

Effective nonviolent struggle is not the product of simple application of the methods of this technique. A struggle con-

ducted by nonviolent means will, generally, be more effective if the participants first understand what the factors are that contribute to greater success or to likely failure, then act accordingly.

Another important variable in nonviolent struggles is whether they are or are not conducted on the basis of a wisely prepared grand strategy and strategies for individual campaigns. The presence or absence of strategic calculations and planning, and, if present, their wisdom, will have a major impact on the course of the struggle and on determining its final outcome. At this point in the historical practice of nonviolent struggle we can project that a very significant factor in its future practice and effectiveness will be its increasing application on the basis of strategic planning.

Competent strategic planning requires not only an understanding of the conflict situation itself, but also an in-depth understanding of why this technique can wield great power, the major characteristics of nonviolent struggle, the many methods that may be applied, and the dynamics and mechanisms at work in actual struggles of this technique when applied against repressive regimes.

The topics and themes of this chapter are all presented more extensively and in greater depth in the remaining chapters of this book.

We will examine the multitude of individual methods encompassed by this technique in the next chapter.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gene Sharp is Senior Scholar at the Albert Einstein Institution in Boston, Massachusetts. From 1965 he held research appointments in Harvard University's Center for International Affairs for nearly thirty years. He is Professor Emeritus of Political Science at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth.

Dr. Sharp has been called "the Clausewitz of nonviolent warfare" and "the Machiavelli of nonviolence." He founded the Albert Einstein Institution in 1983 to promote research, policy studies, and education on the strategic uses of nonviolent struggle in the face of dictatorships, war, genocide, and oppression.

He holds the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in political theory from Oxford University (1968), and a Master of Arts in Sociology (1951) and a Bachelor of Arts in Social Sciences (1949) from Ohio State University. He holds two honorary doctorates and has received other honors.

He lived for ten years in England and Norway. He did advanced studies at Oxford University and in Norway he held positions at the University of Oslo and the Institute for Social Research.

Dr. Sharp is the author of various books and many other publications on nonviolent struggle, power, political problems, liberation struggle, dictatorships, and defense policy. His writings have been published in 32 languages.

His books include *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (1973) (Introduction by Thomas C. Schelling), *Making Europe Unconquerable* (1985) (Foreword by George F. Kennan), *Civilian-Based Defense* (1990), *Social Power and Political Freedom* (1980) (Introduction by Senator Mark O. Hatfield), and *Gandhi as a Political Strategist* (1979 and 1999) (Introduction by Coretta Scott King and Foreword by Frederico Mayor). Sharp's *The Power and Practice of Nonviolent Struggle* (in Tibetan) (1999) carried a Foreword by the Dalai Lama.

His first book, *Gandhi Wields the Weapon of Moral Power* (1960), included a Foreword by Albert Einstein and an Introduction by Bharatan Kumarappa. Sharp is also co-editor of *Resistance, Politics, and the American Struggle for Independence* (1986) and of *Nonviolent Action: A Research Guide* (1997), as well as a contributor to several encyclopedias.

His recent shorter writings include “From Dictatorship to Democracy” (available in 12 languages) (1993, 2002, and 2003), “The Anti-Coup” (co-author) (2003), and “There Are Realistic Alternatives” (2003).

Dr. Sharp has prepared simplified presentations on the nature of nonviolent struggle and its applications against dictatorships and coups d'état. He has conducted workshops and consulted on strategic nonviolent struggle internationally in severe crisis situations.

He is convinced that pragmatic, strategically planned non-violent struggle can be made highly effective for application in conflicts to lift oppression and as a substitute for violence.