NONVIOLENCE: An Introduction

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People try nonviolence for a week, and when it 'doesn't work' they go back to violence, which hasn't worked for centuries.
— Theodore Roszak

In recent years there has been a dramatic increase in the number of people around the world who have taken part in nonviolent political action. It is clear, however, that there is considerable debate about the precise meaning of nonviolence. For some, nonviolent action is an expedient technique for dealing with conflict or bringing about social change; for others, nonviolence is a moral imperative or even a way of life.

REASONS FOR NONVIOLENCE

At first glance, violence may appear to be a superior technique for resolving conflicts or achieving desired ends because it has obvious and tangible strategies and weapons. Nonviolent techniques are often more difficult to visualise and there is no shortage of moral and practical dilemmas that sceptics are able to raise as impediments to taking nonviolence seriously.

Yet many reasons can be offered for the employment of nonviolence: it is a 'weapon' available to all, it is least likely to alienate opponents and third parties, it breaks the cycle of violence and counter-violence, it leaves open the possibility of conversion, it ensures that the media focus on the issue at hand rather than some tangential act of violence and it is the surest way of achieving public sympathy. Further, it is more likely to produce a constructive rather than a destructive outcome, it is a method of conflict resolution that may aim to arrive at the truth of a given situation (rather than mere victory for one side) and it is the only method of struggle that is consistent with the teachings of the major religions.

In addition there are reasons for the employment of nonviolence that go beyond the conviction that it is a useful, or even the only 'correct' method of conflict resolution. Nonviolence can also be the basis for a way of life: it is consistent with a belief in the underlying unity of humankind and it is the only method of action, interpersonal or political, that does not block that path to what has often been called 'self-realisation'.

TYPES OF NONVIOLENCE

'Nonviolence' is an umbrella term for describing a range of methods for dealing with conflict which share the common principle that physical violence, at least against other people, is not used. Gene Sharp, the best known writer on nonviolent action, has compiled the most comprehensive typology of nonviolence; a summary is given in Table 1.

While this typology illustrates the various approaches to nonviolence, the criteria which underpin them are still not clear. These criteria may be identified by examining the two major dimensions of nonviolent action.

The first dimension (the tactical-strategic) indicates the depth of analysis, the ultimate aim and the operational time-frame which activists use. The second dimension (the pragmatic-ideological) indicates the nature of the commitment to nonviolence and the approach to conflict which activists utilise: this includes the importance attached to the relationship between means and ends and the attitude towards the opponent.
Tactical exponents of nonviolent action use short to medium term campaigns in order to achieve a particular goal within an existing social framework; their aim is reform. Strategic exponents of nonviolent action are guided by a structural analysis of social relationships and are mainly concerned about the fundamental transformation of society; particular campaigns are thus conducted within the context of a long-term revolutionary strategy.

Pragmatic exponents use nonviolent action because they believe it to be the most effective method available in the circumstances. They view conflict as a relationship between antagonists with incompatible interests; their goal is to defeat the opponent. Ideological exponents choose nonviolent action for ethical reasons and believe in the unity of means and ends. They view the opponent as a partner in the struggle to satisfy the needs of all. More fundamentally, they may view nonviolence as a way of life.

To summarise, the criteria which underpin the two dimensions of nonviolent action are itemised in Table 2.

By reference to their standing in relation to the criteria itemised in Table 2, it is possible to identify the orientation of individual activists and particular campaigns. For example, virtually all campaigns which have been conducted in Australia (such as the Franklin River campaign) fall into the tactical-pragmatic category. Most campaigns with a Christian perspective (such as the Montgomery bus boycott organised by Martin Luther King Jr.) are examples of the tactical-ideological category. The Palestinian Intifada is probably the best recent example of the strategic-pragmatic category. And many of Gandhi's campaigns (including the Salt Satyagraha) were clearly in the strategic-ideological category.

The commitment of individual activists and the nature of particular campaigns can also be illustrated graphically according to the strength of their standing in relation to each of the criteria identified in the table on the matrix below. They may be located in any quadrant on the matrix, near to or far from a particular axis, and at various distances from the origin.

### IDEOLOGICAL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Montgomery Bus Boycott</th>
<th>Gandhi's Salt Satyagraha</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TACTICAL</td>
<td>STRATEGIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin River Campaign</td>
<td>Palestinian Intifada</td>
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**Fig. 1. Matrix of nonviolence.**

The Dossier will now examine the use of tactical and pragmatic nonviolence and consider the important relationship between means and ends. We will then examine various Christian justifications for nonviolent action as well as Gandhi's conception of it; these traditions provide much of the theoretical basis for ideological (or creed-based) nonviolent activism. The Dossier will then discuss the structural analysis important to an understanding of the strategic use of nonviolent action. It will conclude with an examination of the dynamics of ideological nonviolence and an analysis of the most fundamental reason for adherence to it, that is, as the basis for a way of life.

### Table 1. TYPES OF NONVIOLENCE

| Non-resistance: Non-resistant reject all physical violence on principle and concentrate on maintaining their own integrity, e.g. the attitude of the Amish and Mennonite sects of Christians. |
| Active Reconciliation: A Christian rejection of coercion and a belief in active goodwill and reconciliation, as practiced by the Quakers. |
| Moral Resistance: Moral resisters actively resist evil with peaceful and moral means such as education and persuasion. This has been the basis of much of Western pacifism. |
| Selective Nonviolence: The refusal to participate in particular wars or kinds of war, e.g. nuclear war. |
| Passive Resistance: Nonviolent tactics are employed because the means for an effective violent campaign are lacking or are not likely to succeed; e.g. most strikes, boycotts and national non-cooperation movements belong to this category. |
| Peaceful Resistance: Peaceful resisters believe that nonviolent methods are more effective; e.g. some of Gandhi's campaigns fall into this category because many of his followers did not fully internalize what he taught. |
| Nonviolent Direct Action: Practitioners may view nonviolence as a moral principle or practical method. The object is victory rather than conversion. An example is provided by the Greenham Common actions. |
| Gandhi's Nonviolence (Satyagraha): Satyagraha aims to attain the truth through love and right action; it demands the elimination of violence from the self and from the social, political and economic environment. Gandhi's Salt Satyagraha is a classic example. |
| Nonviolent Revolution: Revolutionaries believe in the need for basic individual and social change and regard the major problems of existing society as structural, e.g. the campaigns of Jayaprakash Narayan and Vinoba Bhave in India. |

(Sharp 1971, pp. 29-54).

### Table 2. NONVIOLENCE: THE MAJOR DIMENSIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITERION</th>
<th>TACTICAL NV</th>
<th>STRATEGIC NV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL FRAMEWORK:</td>
<td>conservative</td>
<td>structural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIM:</td>
<td>reform</td>
<td>revolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPERATIONAL TIMEFRAME:</td>
<td>short/medium-term</td>
<td>long-term</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**THE PRAGMATIC-IDEOLOGICAL DIMENSION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITERION</th>
<th>PRAGMATIC NV</th>
<th>IDEOLOGICAL NV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NATURE OF COMMITMENT:</td>
<td>most effective</td>
<td>ethically best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEANS AND ENDS:</td>
<td>separate</td>
<td>indivisible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPROACH TO CONFLICT:</td>
<td>incompatible interests</td>
<td>shared problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPROACH TO OPPONENT:</td>
<td>competitive</td>
<td>cooperative</td>
</tr>
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NONVIOLENT ACTION IN AUSTRALIA: TACTICAL AND PRAGMATIC

When groups engage in political action, nonviolence is often chosen as the means for securing the ends sought. It is seen as an effective means of coercing concessions from the opponent. Pragmatic nonviolence is more concerned with the potential of individuals to realise their own power, in order to alter power relationships, than with concerns about the arrival at 'truth'. Nonviolent action may be chosen because no other 'weapons' or levers of power are available, or because it is deemed to be the most effective means in the circumstances, even if other weapons are available.

In Australia, as elsewhere, even minor disturbances at demonstrations tend to become the focus of the attention of the news media, often to the exclusion of any meaningful discussion about the original reasons for the protest. Therefore, it is argued, the surest way to garner public support for the real issues is to remain nonviolent, especially in the face of State repression.

The Franklin River Campaign. The most notable campaign in recent years which utilised nonviolent action in the tactical-pragmatic sense was the Franklin River Campaign. The decision to conduct nonviolent actions at various locations adjacent to the proposed Gordon River dam site and in the major cities of Australia reflected the realisation by the (then) Tasmanian Wilderness Society that lobbying the Tasmanian and Federal Governments was not proving effective. It was decided to use various nonviolent actions, and most notably the blockade on the Gordon River (of which the Franklin is a tributary), in order to raise awareness of the issue and to put more pressure on the federal parliamentary parties in the run-up to the federal election in 1983. In effect, nonviolent action was seen as the most effective means of coercing concessions from the Government.

In this campaign there were many different perspectives on the meaning of nonviolent action (among activists located at the base camps and up river) reflecting the usual diversity of views regarding such issues as secrecy and sabotage. Despite these differences there was a broad understanding that the purpose of the campaign was to pressure the parliamentary parties to 'save the Franklin'. Campaign direction and activist effort was focussed on this short-term goal. Even so, it should be noted, some longer term issues were raised by such factors as the emergent community appreciation of wilderness, and, in the context of the blockade itself, the utility of mass arrest as a nonviolent tactic. In the end, the dam was stopped following the election of a new government and a High Court decision.

Other Campaigns. Other campaigns, both before and after the Franklin, have also utilised a tactical-pragmatic approach to nonviolent action. The well-known campaigns of recent years include the anti-Vietnam war movement; the civil liberties struggle in Queensland; the women's ANZAC Day actions; various forest campaigns such as those to save the Daintree, the forests of New South Wales and East Gippsland; the uranium actions in South Australia and the Northern Territory; the Animal Liberation duck rescue teams; the campaigns against the US bases (Pine Gap, North West Cape and Nurrungar); the 'Don't Celebrate 1988' campaign in the year of Australia's white bicentenary; the campaigns against visiting nuclear warships and various campaigns by workers for improved conditions. In addition however, there have been many nonviolent actions conducted throughout Australia's history by Kooris (Aborigines), women, workers, students and local community action groups. In each of these campaigns, the choice of nonviolent action has usually been a direct response to the failure of more conventional means, such as lobbying.

Sabotage, Secrecy and Relations with the Police

Some pragmatic exponents of nonviolent action consider it counterproductive to be bound by particular principles; this is most clearly evident in the divergent attitudes towards sabotage, secrecy and relations with the police.

Some groups limit their nonviolence to other humans, believing that sabotage or the destruction of equipment is justifiable. This may be the case, for instance, when there is a great desire to bring an issue to public notice. At the Nurrungar actions in 1989, for example, many activists were willing to cut fences, some were willing to damage the main installation and some were willing to damage police property.

Many activists argue that there is no time left to be overly concerned about principles in the battle to save what is left of a ravaged environment. A practice known as 'monkeywrenching' (deliberate acts of sabotage directed against machines and tools) has emerged as a response to this belief. There is heated debate within nonviolence circles about the legitimacy of this form of action. Those adhering to nonviolence out of ideological commitment rule it out, while others may consider spiking trees, cutting powerlines and damaging logging machinery as legitimate, as merely 'self-defence of the wild'. During the campaign to save the South East Forests of New South Wales, some activists deliberately damaged bulldozers and other logging equipment particularly during those periods in 1989-1990 when there were few activists available for 'forest actions'.

For many activists, secrecy is a valuable tool and they may design actions which rely on secrecy for success. During the Franklin campaign in 1982-1983, secrecy made it possible for activists to 'surprise' timber workers in relatively inaccessible parts of the forest in order to delay their work. During the Daintree campaign in 1983-1984, some activists were able to bury themselves neck-deep prior to the arrival of workers and the police; this provided strong media images and demonstrated high levels of commitment.

Other campaigns have renounced secrecy either wholly or in part. For the six months from 26 January to 20 July 1972, Kooris defiantly maintained an Aboriginal Tent Embassy on the lawn opposite Parliament House in Canberra. During the women's actions at Pine Gap in November 1983, all planning was done in large group meetings next to the base. During the mass actions in the South East Forests in 1989, most details were given to the police. And during the East Gippsland National Estate forest campaign in early 1990, the police were fully informed. In these cases, actions were designed which did not rely on secrecy for their success and which put considerable emphasis on involving all activists in decision making and, in the last case particularly, on building relationships with individual police. This approach entails the belief that open defiance and a compelling invitation to dialogue are necessary components of any solution to shared problems.

Many activists, however, are unconcerned about their relationship with the police; they simply regard them as the State's most immediate agents of repression. This view was strongly held by some activists at Nurrungar and at various forest, uranium and nuclear warship actions conducted during the past decade. For some activists, public confrontation with the police is an important part of the action. At Nurrungar, this culminated in the use of army troops against the activists, which, in turn, resulted in public disquiet and heavy media coverage of the army presence.
In contrast, other activists with a tactical commitment to nonviolence have deliberately cultivated their relationship with the police (for various reasons) and considered this to be a valuable aspect of their campaign. The various Animal Liberation duck rescue teams and the East Gippsland campaign in 1990 are clear examples of this approach.

ARE MEANS SEPARATE FROM ENDS?

Some political activists believe that the ends achieved will justify any means. They dismiss the nonviolence of those who place a strong emphasis on the purity of means as merely 'symbolic' while defining their own actions as 'real'. In the words of Pelton, what they attempt to do is to 'proclaim that all "means-and-end-moralists" are strangers to the world of action and are passive non-doers' (Pelton, 1974, p. 252). Not only is this not the case, it also ignores some of the important philosophical issues involved in any consideration of the relative importance of means to ends.

Some activists recognise that nonviolence may well prove to be the best means for achieving the ends sought. Others see nonviolence in certain contexts as simply a method of last resort. American social activist, Saul Alinsky, has even gone so far as to claim the following: [I]f Gandhi had had the weapons ... and the people to use them this means would not have been so unreservedly rejected as the world would like to think ... If he had had guns he might well have used them in an armed revolution against the British which would have been in keeping with the traditions of revolutions for freedom through force. Gandhi did not have the guns, and if he had had the guns he would not have had the people to use the guns.

(Alinsky, 1972, pp. 39, 38).

Alinsky sums up his dismissal of ideological nonviolence by noting that 'Means and ends are so qualitatively interrelated that the true question has never been the proverbial one, "Does the End justify the Means?" but always has been "Does this particular end justify this particular means?"' (Alinsky, 1972, p. 47).

But Alinsky overlooked the fact that the ends Gandhi sought were far more ambitious than merely freeing India from British domination and potentially exchanging white exploiters for indigenous ones. Gandhi's aim was to bring about a peaceful and just society, a new India and a new Indian.

Along with Aldous Huxley, who claimed that 'Good ends ... can only be achieved by the employment of appropriate means', and that 'The end cannot justify the means, for the simple reason that the means employed determine the nature of the ends produced' (Huxley, 1938, p. 9), Gandhi maintained that 'The means may be likened to a seed, the end to a tree: and there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree' (Gandhi 1961, p. 10). He added that 'They say "Means are after all means". I would say, "means are after all everything." As the means so the ends. There is no wall of separation between means and ends' (Young India, 17 July 1924). And, 'if one takes care of the means, the end will take care of itself' (Harijan, 11 February 1939).

Huxley notes that the almost universal desire to believe in short cuts to Utopia makes us less than dispassionate when looking at means 'which we know quite certainly to be abominable'. Quoting Thomas à Kempis' famous line, 'All men desire peace, but very few desire those things which make for peace', he adds that 'the thing that makes for peace above all others is the systematic practice in all human relationships of nonviolence' (Huxley, 1938, p. 138). It is the primary means to this important end. Echoing Gandhi, Huxley asserts:

If violence is answered by violence, the result is a physical struggle. Now, a physical struggle inevitably arouses in the minds of those directly and even indirectly concerned in it emotions of hatred, fear, rage and resentment. In the heat of conflict all scruples are thrown to the winds, and all the habits of forbearance and humaneness, slowly and laboriously formed during generations of civilised living, are forgotten. Nothing matters any more except victory. And when at last victory comes to one or other of the parties, this final outcome of physical struggle bears no necessary relation to the rights and wrongs of the case; nor in most cases, does it provide any lasting settlement to the dispute.

(Huxley, 1938, p. 139).

Huxley suggests that the golden rule to be kept in mind when ends, and the means to achieve them, are chosen is to ask whether the result will be merely the attainment

1 Young India and Harijan were newspapers edited by Mahatma Gandhi in India.
of some immediate goal, or to transform the society to which they are applied 'into a just, peaceable, morally and intellectually progressive community of non-attached and responsible men and women' (Huxley, 1938, p. 32).

**IDEOLOGICAL NONVIOLENCE**

For many adherents of nonviolence, the rationale for it being the preferred method of political activism rests on more than a pragmatic assessment that it works better than other methods. It is good not only because it 'works' but also because it is 'right'. These activists tend to see the aim of nonviolence as persuasion and conversion of opponents, rather than coercion.

Most Western believers in nonviolence as a creed belong to one of two groups: firstly, members of nonviolent Christian sects or individuals who have come to the conviction that nonviolence is the only method of disputing that is consistent with the teachings of The Bible; and secondly, those who have been influenced by the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi.

(a) **Christian Views of Nonviolence.**

Christians generally accept the proposition that 'God is love'. This leads to the logical corollary that the main enemy is hatred itself. Relying particularly on New Testament texts, such as the sayings of Jesus that 'Whoever shall say [to his brother] 2 Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire' (Matthew 5:22) and 'anyone who hates his brother is a murderer' (1 John 3:15), Christians have interpreted the terms 'brother' and 'neighbour' (following the parable of the Good Samaritan) at their widest. And this means loving opponents and even enemies:

- Care as much about each other as about yourselves...
- Never pay back evil for evil...
- If your enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink...
- Do not let evil conquer you, but use good to defeat evil.

(Romans 12:16-21).

While the exhortations of Jesus to nonviolence are legion, the way of putting this nonviolence into practice has been interpreted in different ways. Throughout history Christians have had to make a decision whether it was their duty to shun an evil world or to act to change it.

Of those that have chosen an active engagement, many of the most notable peace activists have belonged to the Society of Friends — the Quakers. Quakers believe that there is something of God in every person, and that in the face of evil, as Christians, they are called upon to act in a way that is most likely to reach 'that of God' in the other and so change an evil mind into a right mind. And this is not something that can be achieved by violence.

Catholic monk Thomas Merton is probably the best known of the recent ideological Christian nonviolence theorists. While his nonviolence closely resembles that of Gandhi, the focus of his writings was the evils of war and particularly the Vietnam war and nuclear armaments. Although he lamented the lack of active protest among Catholics, he warned of the dangers inherent in a philosophy that aims to proclaim the truth and to help the adversary realise it. The temptation to self-righteousness and an unwillingness to see the other's point of view had to be guarded against, as did direct action that was 'oriented to the affirmation of the rightness, the determination and the conviction of the protesters, and not to the injustice of the law' that was being protested against. And of course if, in breaking a law during protest, the punishment provided is not accepted the Christian nonviolent resister becomes 'a mere revolutionary' (Merton, 1980, p. xxxvi).

Varieties of Christian Campaigns. During the Vietnam anti-war movement in the United States, Christians, even priests and nuns, took part in many campaigns of direct action. Probably the best known of these activists were Merton's friends, the Jesuit priests Daniel and Philip Berrigan. The Berrigans were imprisoned for acts of civil disobedience such as raids on draft board offices and the destruction of draft records, and eventually for trespassing in a weapons factory and damaging nuclear missile nosecones with hammers. They maintained that their destruction of property was nonviolent as long as the destroyed property belonged to a class that 'has no right to exist'.

While Merton may have had some doubt as to the inclusion of such actions under the rubric of ideological nonviolence (see definition above), he may have been at least tacitly supportive as long as the Berrigans were willing to accept and endure punishment as part of their witness. In this case however a further dispute arose as to whether 'going underground' to continue educating people (the course of action chosen by the priests), rather than immediately accepting the punishment of the State, is still within the bounds of nonviolence.

One of this century's most celebrated nonviolent activists has been Martin Luther King Jr. The Alabama pastor achieved world prominence following his organisation of the Montgomery bus boycott in the mid-1950s. Inspired by the example of Rosa Parks, Blacks, who were obliged to give up their seats to white passengers, started boycotting the bus system entirely. Under King's instructions to sustain 'Christian love', the Blacks maintained nonviolent discipline in the face of terrorism from white extremists. Within a year the bus system had been desegregated.

King declared that 'The nonviolent resister not only refuses to shoot his opponent but he also refuses to hate him. At the center of nonviolence stands the principle of love' (King, 1958, pp. 103-104); and he warned that the 'tactics of nonviolence without the spirit of nonviolence may become a new kind of violence.' Yet nonviolent tactics were important. Reflecting on matters in jail following his arrest during the Birmingham desegregation campaign,
King responded to religious leaders of Alabama with a tone of despair. They had told him that 'When rights are consistently denied, a cause should be pressed in the courts and in negotiations among local leaders, and not in the streets'. King, showing disillusionment with white moderates, answered in his acclaimed *Letter From Birmingham City Jail* that 'history is the long and tragic story of the fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily', hence the need for direct action.

(b) *Satyagraha* —

The Nonviolence of Mahatma Gandhi

Satyagraha, Gandhi explained, is 'literally holding onto Truth and it means, therefore, Truth-force. Truth is soul or spirit. It is therefore known as soul force' (*Young India*, 23 March 1921). The technique of nonviolent struggle that Gandhi evolved in South Africa to gain rights for Indians was originally described by the English phrase 'passive resistance'. Gandhi, however, felt that the term 'was too narrowly constructed, that it was supposed to be a weapon of the weak, that it could be characterized by hatred and that it could manifest itself as violence' (Gandhi, 1966, p. 266). These attributes were not applicable to his method of direct action and so he coined the new word 'satyagraha' (sat: truth, agra: firmness).

Satyagraha implies working steadily towards a discovery of the truth and converting the opponent into a friend in the process. In other words, it is not used against anybody but is done with somebody. 'It is based on the idea that the moral appeal to the heart or conscience is more effective than an appeal based on threat or bodily pain or violence' (Gandhi, 1961, p. iii). And for Gandhi it had to be a creed, a way of life, to be truly effective.

In satyagraha the following propositions are kept in mind:

1. The aim in group struggle is to act in a way conducive to long-term, universal, maximal reduction of violence.
2. The character of the means used determines the character of the results.
3. A constructive program — positive peacebuilding work should be a part of every campaign.
4. One should engage in positive struggle in favour of human beings and certain values; that is, fight antagonisms, not antagonists.
5. All human beings have long-term interests in common.
6. Violence is invited from opponents if they are humiliated or provoked.
7. A violent attitude on the part of would-be satyagrahis (advocates of satyagraha) is less likely if they have made clear to themselves the essential elements of their case and the purpose of the struggle.
8. The better opponents understand the satyagrahi's position and conduct, the less likely they are to resort to violence. Secrecy should therefore be avoided.
9. The essential interests which opponents have in common should be clearly formulated and cooperation established on that basis.
10. Personal contact with the opponent should be sought.
11. Opponents should not be judged harder than the self.
12. Opponents should be trusted.
13. The property of opponents should not be destroyed.
14. An unwillingness to compromise on non-essentials decreases the likelihood of converting the opponent.
15. The conversion of an opponent is furthered by personal sincerity.
16. The best way to convince an opponent of your sincerity is to make sacrifices for the cause.

How is one to decide which of two opposing cases is nearer the truth? According to Gandhi, the voice of conscience must be obeyed in these circumstances. Of course this may present further problems: what one person sees as truth may just as clearly be untrue for another. For this reason, Gandhi warns, 'no one has the right to coerce others to act according to his own view of truth' (*Harijan*, 24 November 1933); therefore, nonviolence is the only appropriate means for arriving at the truth. If the position held by the satyagrahi proves to be further from the truth than that of the opponent it will only be the satyagrahi who suffers; others will not be made to suffer for the satyagrahi's mistake.

**STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS — UNDERSTANDING HIDDEN VIOLENCE**

For many strategic exponents of nonviolent action the search for truth also entails a detailed analysis designed to uncover the violence inherent in existing structures. According to this analysis, violence is a problem at the level of individual behaviour, at the level of group process and at the level of political structure. It is for this reason that nonviolent analysis can be clearly distinguished from that of liberalism and pacifism on the one hand and from Marxism and anarchism on the other.

At the personal level, this analysis — like that of feminism — recognises the structural violence inherent, for instance, in exclusive language and behaviour. And while it is clear that this language and behaviour reflects the nature of institutionalised values and political structures, it is only at the level of individual behaviour that meaningful change to this form of structural violence can occur. Consequently, the analysis encourages the adoption of an alternative value set which manifests itself, *inter alia*, in the use of non-exclusive language and behaviour.

At the process level, this analysis emphasises the structural violence inherent, for instance, in traditional group dynamics which are usually hierarchical, dominated by men and decided by majority vote. It is also recognised that this process reinforces and is reinforced by personal and political structures of violence as well. Consequently,
the analysis encourages the adoption of empowering group processes: no hierarchy, decisions by consensus, systematic efforts to deal with gender and other power imbalances within the group, and a genuine commitment to skill-sharing.

However, it is clear to most nonviolence theorists that violence whether direct, structural, cultural or ecological cannot be solved simply by the adoption of new norms regulating individual conduct or group behaviour. Therefore, nonviolence theorists emphasise the violence inherent in such political structures as patriarchy, capitalism and the state. However, unlike Marxists, who advocate the capture of state power by the proletariat through force, or the democratic socialists who argue that socialists should win political power by constitutional means before proceeding to replace capitalism with socialism, nonviolence theorists usually share the anarchist aversion to state power in any form. According to Gandhi, the state is deeply rooted in force and violence in fact this is the essential nature of the state. It 'represents violence in a concentrated or organised form' (see Modern Review, October 1935, p. 415).

Therefore, nonviolence theorists are more interested in a comprehensive strategy of resistance and disruption, coupled with the creation of a vast network of cooperative organisations which will ultimately supplant capitalist control of the production process and functionally undermine patriarchy and state power.

Opponents; Not Enemies. How this is done and the attitude to the opponent is centrally important however, and accounts for one further element in the structural analysis of nonviolence theory: the clear distinction made between political structures and their functionaries. For instance, agents of capitalism and the state may work to protect vested interests, but they are also human beings who share the wider struggle for liberation and self-realisation. It is for this reason that opponents, third parties and state functionaries (such as the police) are treated with respect. At the ideological level, the commitment is to resolutely resist particular facets of the opponents’ behaviour; but to do so in a way which affirms the integrity of the opponents and their capacity for growth and in a way which challenges them to examine their values and beliefs. At the strategic level, the aim is to undermine the role of state functionaries and to encourage their defection. There are obvious advantages to be gained from this approach. In the words of Gandhi: ‘My non-cooperation is with methods and systems, never with men’ (Young India, 12 September 1929).

In essence then, instead of interpreting the conflict of interests inherent in capitalism, for example, as one between capitalists and workers, nonviolence theorists interpret the conflict as one between the structure of capitalism and the people within it. Having identified workers as the most exploited class, nonviolent strategists would endeavour to mobilise and organise workers (together with solidarity activists) in order to resist worker exploitation in a way which maximises the possibility of also liberating (rather than killing or marginalising) the oppressors. There is no doubt that this approach suggests a very different understanding of the process of revolution.

THE DYNAMICS OF NONVIOLENCE

At the level of practice, nonviolent activists consider political oppression and economic exploitation to be the direct result of the ‘acquiescence’ of the oppressed and exploited. Therefore, nonviolence aims to empower the disempowered by providing them with an accessible ‘weapon’ with which to alter the power relationship. In addition, it allows for the possibility that power relationships may be sidestepped altogether.

Success through nonviolent action can be achieved in three main ways. Firstly, accommodation may result when the opponent has not experienced a change of heart but has conceded some or all points in order to gain peace or to cut losses. Secondly, nonviolent coercion may result when the opponent wants to continue the struggle but cannot do so because they have lost the sources of power and means of control. Thirdly, conversion may result when the opponent has changed inwardly to the degree that they want to make the changes desired by the nonviolent activist (or indeed the nonviolent activist has changed towards the views of the opponent) (Sharp, 1973, pp. 705-755).

Although preferable to coercion based on physical force or threat, the first two types of conflict outcome imply a contest of power between the parties. In these cases, productive outcomes (ones in which all parties are satisfied with the result) will rarely be arrived at. Conversion, on the other hand, operates outside the framework of the interplay between power and powerlessness the touching of the conscience involves a totally different dynamic.

Acceptance of Suffering. The dynamics of ideological nonviolence is based on the acceptance of suffering. By accepting rather than inflicting suffering, the opponent is confronted with a situation that requires a choice rather than a reflex action. In addition, it requires that this choice be made against someone who has occupied the moral high ground, producing a situation that Richard Gregg has aptly termed ‘moral jiu-jitsu’. A moral choice, which otherwise may not have been contemplated, is demanded of the opponent:

He suddenly and unexpectedly loses the moral support which the usual violent resistance of most victims would render him. He plunges forward, as it were, into a new world of values. He feels insecure because of the novelty of the situation and his ignorance of how to handle it. He loses his poise and self-confidence. The victim not only lets the attacker come, but, as it were, pulls him forward by kindness, generosity and voluntary suffering, so that the attacker loses his moral balance. (Gregg, 1966, p. 41).

The voluntary acceptance of suffering is designed to purify the activist by demonstrating the sincerity of the activist to himself; it also demonstrates this sincerity to others. Further, it is an appeal to the opponent and the (as yet) uncommitted audience. In the dialectic of nonviolence both the sufferer and the opponent are transformed: the opponent(s) by being compelled to confront their own views on the truth of the situation which may lead to conversion; and the sufferer who may be morally enriched by not compromising fundamental principles.
Even where nonviolence does not touch the conscience of the opponent it can still generate objective benefits in conflict situations, especially those involving social conflict. The opponent may be converted indirectly (or possibly coerced) by being shamed into changing their behaviour if consistent nonviolence in the face of provocation moves public opinion to the side of the activist. Gandhi, with surprising candour, has on occasion claimed that the method of reaching the heart is to awaken public opinion! Violence to persons or property has the effect of clouding the real issues involved in the original conflict while nonviolent action when used non-coercively invites the parties to a dialogue about the issues themselves. Gandhian theorist Joan Bondurant explains it this way:

The objective is not to assert propositions, but to create possibilities. In opening up new choices and in confronting an opponent with the demand that he make a choice, the [nonviolent activist] involves himself in acts of 'ethical existence'. The process forces a continuing examination of one's own motives, an examination undertaken within the context of relationships as they are changed towards a new, restructured, and reintegrated pattern.

(Bondurant, 1967, p. vii).

She continues by noting that this dialectical process is essentially creative and inherently constructive. Its immediate object is...

a restructuring of the opposing elements to achieve a situation which is satisfactory to both the original opposing antagonists but in such a way as to present an entirely new total circumstance ... through the operation of non-violent action the truth as judged by the fulfillment of human needs will emerge in the form of a mutually satisfactory and agreed-upon solution.


The end of this process is truth, the means for reaching it is nonviolence. Because it is an axiom of satyagraha that good ends can never grow out of bad means, there should be no threat, coercion or punishment. Instead, the person practicing satyagraha undergoes self-suffering in the optimistic belief that by touching the opponent's conscience, they can be converted to seeing the truth of the satyagrahi's position; or in the belief that a clearer vision of truth for both parties will grow out of the dialectical process. While the adherent of satyagraha tries to convert, they remain open to persuasion. The use of violence indicates an already closed mind.

Ideologically motivated nonviolence aims not so much at changing the opponent's behaviour; rather it aims to change the opponent's values which in turn will lead to a change in behaviour. Changed behaviour without changed values and attitudes can only be maintained through coercion, which is inconsistent with the philosophy of ideological nonviolence. This form of nonviolence, in short, goes beyond merely redressing the immediate grievance that has surfaced as conflict, and aims to resolve the distrust and friction that may be the underlying sources of the conflict; this can lead to a clearer understanding of the self.

An Australian Example. In Australia, one group which is attempting to utilise nonviolent struggle in the ideological and strategic sense articulated by Gandhi is the Melbourne Rainforest Action Group (RAG). Melbourne RAG is an activist group dedicated to halting the destruction of the world's rainforests; its immediate campaign goal is to halt the import of rainforest timber into Australia.

Its campaign includes the usual components of any nonviolent strategy — research, education, negotiations and nonviolent action. The campaign has relied on high levels of activist commitment to the ideological conception of nonviolence — including the renunciation of secrecy and sabotage, and a genuine endeavour to establish and build relationships with unionists, the police and representatives of the timber industry. In addition, for many (but not all) RAG activists, the immediate campaign goal — to halt Australia's imports of rainforest timber through grassroots action (rather than government decision) — is just part of a long-term strategy for social transformation. For this reason, the group is active at the personal, process and political levels — and is particularly committed to undermining the structural causes of rainforest destruction.

The RAG campaign has always included the call for a community boycott of rainforest timber. While this is important as a nonviolent tactic (and draws attention to the need for personal responsibility), it is clearly inadequate as a strategy in itself because it fails to take account of the power of vested interests which profit from rainforest destruction and the timber trade.

A community boycott by itself is inadequate because it is based on the assumption that the capitalist market will readily respond to consumer demand and seek ways of supplying rainforest timber produced in an environmentally sustainable way. This premise is in clear conflict with the essence of capitalist economics which is based on profit maximisation. Capitalism uses whatever mechanisms are necessary (including pricing and advertising) in order to manipulate consumer demand to suit profit-maximising production. It is for this reason that RAG has also consistently sought to interfere with the trade in rainforest timber (for instance, by blockading rainforest timber ships in the Yarra River, by negotiating union bans and by picketing in support of the Sarawak natives who disrupt the production of rainforest timber (by blockading logging trucks invading their tribal lands).
From the beginning, RAG has consistently liaised with unions, Kooris and other groups in order to gain their support. The aim is to forge an alliance between activists, rank and file unionists and other exploited members of the community (based on a clear activist commitment to social justice for the latter two groups) in order to disrupt, delegitimise and eventually halt the import of rainforest timbers.

While imported rainforest timber constitutes only a small proportion of Australia's timber use and intervention in this part of the trade may be successful with only limited worker support (and despite some worker opposition), it is clear to RAG that any major restructuring of the Australian timber industry — in order to permanently eliminate the Australian threat to old-growth forests posed by industrial logging — will depend on high levels of cooperation between activists and unionists; something clearly missing from forest campaigns in Australia to date. In addition, restructuring depends on a way of dealing with timber industry opponents which transcends the polarisation generated by other campaigns in the past.

Thus, while clearly opposed to the motives and interests which underpin the timber industry, RAG maintains a high level of courtesy and dialogue with its representatives as part of its longer term goal to transform the industry. For this reason, RAG is encouraging alternative policies which include more use of recycled timber; an end to woodchipping of old-growth forests for export; a return to small scale, labour-intensive sawmilling; and a shift to plantation grown indigenous timbers.

By utilising the principles of nonviolent struggle in this way, RAG endeavours to focus attention on the reality that rainforest destruction is a problem shared by all.

NONVIOLENCE AND HUMAN UNITY

Many nonviolence theorists see an even deeper rationale for nonviolence than the ones to which we have already referred. The essence of the practice of nonviolence is that it seeks to liquidate antagonisms but not the antagonists themselves ("hate the sin but not the sinner"). This may be based on religious injunction or on a strong sense of the unity of all life; either way, this means that it is ethically wrong and existentially or spiritually self-defeating to treat another with less dignity than is warranted by a shared humanity or divine inheritance.

According to this line of thought, not only does dehumanisation pave the way for violence, dehumanisation is violence. And those who do not believe in a social order based on violence should not be perpetuating it by dehumanising others. Nonviolence, therefore, precludes the concept of an enemy, of relating to another as a thing. To borrow Martin Buber's phrases, nonviolence can be characterised as defining a relationship, even in a conflict situation, in terms of 'I — You' rather than 'I — It'. While the way of violence works as a monologue, the substance of nonviolence is a dialogue: the aim is to convince the other party (while remaining open to being convinced oneself) and to bring them to discover another person like themself, rather than a mere adversary.

In other words the struggle to overcome violence is important not only in order to achieve justice for the world but also to end violence per se. Violence does more than maintain structures of oppression it also prevents the fulfillment of human potential by blocking one important prerequisite: the honest appreciation of shared humanity.

Academic psychologist Leroy Pelton, in his examination of the psychology of nonviolence, claims that the idea of self-suffering 'melting the heart' of the opponent (in order to achieve a conversion) is a gross oversimplification; that it may even 'elicit a negative reaction towards the victim' (Pelton, 1974, p. 143). Nonviolence theorists are not so unsophisticated as to be unaware of this possibility; consequently they believe that hardship undertaken by activists must be functional. The opponent must not be encouraged to act against the adherent of nonviolence merely to induce martyr-like self-suffering because the brutalisation of the adversary will diminish the possibility of conversion. This brutalisation must be avoided so that the opponent is not compelled to inflict punishment; they should not be tempted to engage in behaviour that blocks their own realisation of a shared humanity and divinity.

Some leading authorities on nonviolence (in particular Gandhi) consider existence to be a unity; they believe that suffering and conflict are the result of the introduction of duality (where the self is seen as a totally distinct entity, completely separated from others) into an essentially non-dualistic situation. For them, therefore, the eschewing of violence, even at the risk of personal loss, is a manifest declaration of the truth of non-duality. In attempting to end violence, they argue, the nonviolent activist is really encouraging to act against the adherent of nonviolence merely to induce martyr-like self-suffering because the brutalisation of the adversary will diminish the possibility of conversion. This brutalisation must be avoided so that the opponent is not compelled to inflict punishment; they should not be tempted to engage in behaviour that blocks their own realisation of a shared humanity and divinity.

This connection between violence and the quest for what may be termed self-realisation may be summed up in the following formula adapted from Arne Naess, another analyst of Gandhian nonviolence:

1. Self-realisation presupposes a search for Truth.
2. In the last analysis humankind (or even all life) is one.
3. Violence against oneself makes complete self-realisation impossible.
4. Violence against another is violence against the self.
5. Violence against another makes complete self-realisation impossible.

(Naess, 1965, pp.28-33).
CONCLUSION

As a method of activism nonviolence guarantees no automatic and unfailing success; no method of conflict resolution does. For those who are pessimistic about the ability of nonviolence to resolve conflicts, Naess sums up Gandhi's probable response with the words: 'Have you tried? I have, and it works' (Naess, 1965, p. 78). Ultimately, exponents of ideological nonviolence argue, it works because it seeks to deal with the causes, rather than the symptoms, of conflict.

The rationale, then, for the use of nonviolence as the preferred method of political activism or philosophy of life rests on the twin convictions that it 'works' instrumentally and that it is 'right' ethically.

Further Reading

Naess, A., 1974: Gandhi and Group Conflict, Oslo, Universitetsforlaget.

Those wishing to keep abreast of debates concerning nonviolence theory and activity and to be informed about nonviolent actions within Australia and elsewhere may wish to subscribe to Australia's journal of nonviolent action and information Nonviolence Today. NVT is published six times a year. Further information can be obtained by writing to P.O. Box 292, West End, Queensland 4101, or by telephoning (07) 366 2660.