

WAR RESISTERS' INTERNATIONAL
STUDY CONFERENCE

TRAINING IN NONVIOLENCE

13th-20th August 1965, at Perugia, Italy

NONVIOLENT TRAINING IN THE UNITED STATES

Paper submitted by:

Theodore Olson

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1. By nonviolent training we mean conscious attempts, in the context of teaching and learning, to impart historical experience, general concepts, technical skills and personal experience in how to act effectively and nonviolently in conflict situations. By "nonviolently" we mean to stress programmatic or active nonviolence, as exemplified by - but not restricted to - social action struggles: e.g., Gandhi's action in India and that of the peace and race actionists in the United States.

But as we shall see, this definition, if applied retrospectively, would deny the name of training to much that in former years passed under that name. And if applied too narrowly it would eliminate from consideration much governmental or quasi-governmental work related to nonviolent training. Therefore the paper will proceed in great part descriptively, not attempting to pass final judgment on all that is called nonviolent training in the United States, but trying instead to relate these efforts to the definition and perhaps to test the definition.

☆ 1. 2. The concrete notion of non-violent action on social problems - to say nothing of training - came to birth quite late in the United States. 1. After the Second World War American pacifists began an abortive social action campaign against racial discrimination, conscription and the rearmament incident to the rise of the Cold War. This effort proved abortive for many reasons, some quite beyond anyone's control. But in part it failed to draw others into a continuing struggle because many of its leaders, particularly as they worked through the then-central organization of Peacemakers, saw nonviolence as integrally connected to anarchism, ruralism, vegetarianism, sexual experimentation and other concerns of little interest to the main stream of American life.

☆ 1. see page 6.

In the Dulles era, with the onset of major bomb-testing programs and with the example of Negro nonviolence in Montgomery under King, radical nonviolence underwent a renaissance. Its forays against bomb-test sites, missile bases, submarine yards and the civil defense program raised it to continuous public view and played a role in bringing about the public pressure that ended atmospheric bomb-testing and the strategy of massive retaliation.

Here a curious contrast developed, however. In the Negro freedom struggle, non-violent training and discipline became the key to success. People could be trained and were willing to be trained because there were concrete ends in view, physically realizable goals to be achieved. Often it was experienced peace actionists who aided in this training. But in their own peace movement there was little that could be called nonviolent training. Projects were sporadic and unrelated; they took place at sites to which people came for a "confrontation" and after which they left. Some efforts were by nature elite operations requiring youth or nautical skills.

Perhaps most significant was the distinctive moral basis of peace action in the hey-day of the Committee for Nonviolent Action. An ideology of purity and suffering came to dominate projects. It stated that appeal was to the "heart", that "unmerited suffering" would "generate spiritual power." This power would in some way "reach" opponents and general populace and bring about conversions to the point where governments would be forced to alter policies. At least as it developed in American direct action, this notion hindered the growth of training. For what, exactly did one need to be trained? Beyond bravery, persistence and the expertise necessary to swim a cold river or walk a thousand miles, what need was there for what we now find desirable for second and third-line leadership: a year of sociologically oriented study and experience? One was either morally nonviolent or he was not. Becoming qualified took care of itself.

3. But as this movement developed its characteristic excesses, it moved steadily away from contact with its ostensible target: the American people. Problems became more complex than bomb-testing. Are there moral distinctions to be made between massive retaliation and counter-force doctrine? How is one to demonstrate effectively with bomb-test tactics against newly-sophisticated techniques and strategies? Ironically, the protest movement associated with CNVA was collapsing into an ideologically-committed hard core just at the time that government and intellectuals were coming to accept key parts of the radical pacifist critique of Cold War dogma. Perhaps the most important element accepted was the idea of proportionate response to attack, response that did not foreclose in advance the necessity of further and constructive contact with the opponent after the first blows had been struck. At this point, in the early 'Sixties, a complex realignment took place in the peace and race efforts - an operation that can be appreciated only in the context of analogous events within other contexts.

A. Public agencies, from the Federal government to local law enforcement (which is quite autonomous and often ideosyncratic in the United States), increasingly took into account not only the notion of proportionate response, but also the idea of initiatives. They began to appreciate the political and social utility of unfreezing conflict situations through overtures that did not seek advantages but actually put the initiators under some risk and possible disadvantage: they discovered the virtue of vulnerability.

Though little has come of it concretely, particularly since the passing of Kennedy and Khrushchev, the idea of unilateral initiatives - and the political and social disciplines necessary to carry them through - has become an option at many levels of U.S. national policy. Domestically the Federal government has learned to work complementarily with massive civil rights actions. Its field agents have sometimes shown great understanding of the dynamic of non-violence. At another level, New York State has, by law, legitimated the rent strike, in which tenants withhold rent in substandard buildings or put the money into escrow or trust accounts pending remedial action by the building owners.

At still another level, police forces have begun to be trained in minimally-violent methods and in techniques other than the use of violence. In America, where even the police directing traffic are heavily-armed, this move away from total reliance upon the ironmongery of massive violence is particularly significant. In several cities, leaders of peace and race nonviolence have been called on to aid police officials in this training. In the South, some police bodies have sought to avoid the unfavorable publicity attendant on brutal suppression of civil rights activities by conducting their operations in large part through at least overtly nonviolent behaviour. In some cases this has achieved notable short-run success. For a time in New York City, after a disastrous incident marked by poor control of participants on the part of both peace actionists and police, actionists were left largely alone to police their own activities. Action plans were agreed upon by extensive consultation between police officials and actionists. Though the contact has been informal, each side has done a good deal to aid the other in nonviolent training.

- B. In quasi-governmental and other "public" programs, more dramatic ventures have been undertaken. Local government personnel assigned to work with teen-age gangs have developed operational nonviolence to a level achieved only by the most sophisticated peace and race actionists. Other governmentally-supported experimental programs have taken as their purview the entire structure and functioning of depressed areas. In the largest of these programs, it became established policy to support radical nonviolent attacks on community problems. A controversial but often-effective Chicago-based social mobilization organization for minorities depends on hard-hitting and at least overtly nonviolent tactics.
- C. Civil rights nonviolence needs no summary here, its effectiveness being known everywhere. But there is increasing use of nonviolent tactics in other urban problems on the part of local groups, focussing on housing, transportation, schools, criminal elements, recreational facilities and even the intangibles of "dignity" and "participation".
- D. While all these activities were growing peace effort nonviolence was not, nor was training. As was suggested earlier, peace activity, as then conceived

was difficult to train for. But in 1962, after a period of experimentation on the West Coast, a new structure was put forward for peace activity. Without judging among competing organizations and peace strategies - except to exclude those based on the triumph of one side or the other in the Cold War - it set up a structure in which all American organizations at all concerned with a "turn toward peace" could cooperate at national, regional and especially the local levels. There was no attempt to set up a common denominator programme but instead a conscious effort to put before the public the full range of policies and programs through which any concerned citizen could work actively for peace on a regular continuing basis. Participating groups ranged from war veterans to labour unions to social service agencies to direct action groups.

Focussed particularly at the community level on the "community peace center", the Turn Toward Peace program required for successful operation sophisticated and well-trained people. For the first time in peace training, there were a multitude of specific and continuing tasks for which people could be trained - tasks that did not require a prior commitment to an esoteric lore or to a pacifist ideology.

With this need there developed the notion of a school for training pre-professionals or "internes" to work on peace, race and urban problems. This program operated experimentally in New York City, under my direction, then spread to other cities.² In September, 1965, Upland Institute, a full-time professional school of social action training, opens its doors in Chester, Pa.

The direct influence of the non-violent action groups themselves in the pilot training programs, and in local TTP structures, was often small. TTP was viewed with reserve by many of these agencies. And for the most part they had no local affiliates, nor were they geared to on-going community work. Further, attention was laid from the beginning in TTP on penetration of Middle class institutions and organizations, a program from which the direct action agencies were largely self-exiled. Nonetheless, the basis was laid for community-centered, functional nonviolence. It was continually emphasized in my own work that nonviolent direct action was an integral part of the arsenal of community peace action. And if, as seemed crucial, a relation were to be built with race and urban problems agencies, it became even more necessary to include direct action in a wide variety of programs. The Upland program will insure this connection, with its unified training of all sorts of agency trainees.

A separate program has grown up using the idea of civilian defense as its model: unarmed national resistance to aggression. Canadian and American Quakers have led in a steady expansion of training ordinary citizens in the comprehensive means of defending an invaded society without arms. The chief utility of

☆ 2. See page 6.

this program is that the civilian or social defense idea brings together all the techniques of nonviolence and integrates them into one operational program focussing on defense of the empirical society. This year's program included a sustained attack-and-defense exercise on Grindstone Island in Canada.

4. Other programs have of course continued. Notably the American Friends Service Committee, the New York Yearly Meeting of Friends and the Committee for Nonviolent Action's New England branch have all conducted regular programs under the rubric of "non-violent training". Each makes its own contribution, but I feel that each has major drawbacks as presently constituted. 3. The Quaker summer institutes draw their constituency from committed pacifists and from others newly-alienated from the main stream of American life. The Quaker emphasis on the individual and upon subjective response often hinders any understanding that training must center on concrete organizational jobs, actual physical tasks integrated into a continuing and pragmatic program of broad social change. Too often Quaker training stops with internalized attitudes and merely personal activities powered by short-run emotions. Individuals from this milieu, however, have often played key roles in, for example, the early CNVA campaigns and in Turn Toward Peace.

New York Yearly Meeting has experimented with role-playing and other psychological means of insight into nonviolence. Its program shows promise of growth but is presently confined to the haute bourgeois constituency of New York area Quakers.

The CNVA program, centered on its farm in Connecticut, is an outgrowth of the campaign of several years ago in which small groups of robust persons attempted to hinder the construction and launching of Polaris submarines. Here, in a rural setting, a fairly broad range of ideas and techniques is put forward that have to do with nonviolence. Demonstrations, often imaginatively conceived, are conducted with some regularity. Problems here are constituted by the narrow understanding now current in CNVA about the relation of direct action and its practitioners to the rest of society. Demonstrations tend to be just that: demonstrations of the convictions shared by this close-knit in-group. The long-term means of conviction and social mobilization are neglected and the impression is conveyed of an almost total rejection of contemporary American society. Yet it is by no means true that this and other programs are of no value. What is taught is of value; and what is learned is often greater than what is taught.

5. The prospects are not bright for non-violent training in the United States. The TTP national program has been cut back, due to a number of problems - some of its own making. The Upland Institute will have to play a major role in producing trained people now that TTP is unable to continue systematic seminars.

In the freedom movement, nonviolence in crisis areas is on the wane. Violence and the threat of violence seem to produce what nonviolence often does not: an immediate lessening of police or mob brutality. Also the growth of Federal and state programs implementing civil rights legislation has moved the focus of work. Instead of mass agitation for new laws or for the abrogation of unjust customs, attention has shifted to the machinery necessary to carry out compliance with now-extant legislation. Still other areas are less amenable to rectification by law: e.g. the fact

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that over the past generation the Negro share of national employment and national income has slipped downward. Here the usual techniques of nonviolence have yet to show their direct applicability. But here too training and a high degree of sophistication will be required of local leaders for them to re-apply old techniques, and discover and implement new ones.

The present foreign policy crises, so deceptively amenable to military solutions and so steadily slipping out of control, are having a marked effect on the peace effort. The effect of Santo Domingo and Viet Nam on the sensitized public is twofold. First it constricts sensible discussion in the name of national unity in a time of crisis. Secondly, the nakedly aggressive aspects of both crises have given rise to a mindless reaction on the part of many sensitive people, causing them to be purely negative toward their own society, sometimes even falling prey to pro-Moscow and pro-Peking elements with a vested interest in fostering such alienation. In such a situation, action does not develop sophistication or communicability. A continual crisis atmosphere inhibits long-range training; and short-run training is often outflanked by the onrush of events.

Still, developments in UN peacekeeping, in governmental and other public programs point toward a convergence of interest among law enforcement, order-creating and change-fostering agencies. This can only be exploited and implemented through thorough, long-range training integrally related to non-violence.

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1. Isolated early examples, such as those of the first New England Quakers, exercised little or no influence on succeeding generations. Pre-Civil War social radicalism organized freedom routes for escaped slaves, but its nascent social action program - including pacifism - was destroyed by the passions of the Civil War and the subsequent rise of a boastful and bellicose bourgeois capitalism. This in turn provoked the rise of a new pacifism, drawing into uneasy but close alliance socialist and Christian critiques of war and nationalism. This movement foundered on the First World War and emerged from that struggle a tiny group dominated for the first time by convinced pacifists. Still the emphases were largely determined by the legalistic idealism of that era, stressing treaties, resolutions and governmental superstructures. Only through the labour struggles of the Great Depression was nonviolence or pacifism hitched to concrete struggles with living bodies. Secular and Christian pacifists helped powerfully to shape the nonviolent and quasi-violent struggles to organize industrial unions. So deeply enmeshed were pacifists that their major organization, the FOR, split over the issue of violence in labour organization. Subsequently the schismatics helped to bring America actively into the anti-Hitler war.

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2. See the training manual for this program: Theodore Olson, Peace and the American Community (New York: Turn Toward Peace, 1963), vii+650; \$2.00 from 218 E. 18th, New York.

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3. For a critique of the TTP program, see my "Peace Training: A Beginning" Our Generation, Vol.III, No.2

WAR RESISTERS' INTERNATIONAL
88 Park Avenue, Enfield, Middx. England

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