

Choosing Nonviolent Action



From left to right: WRI activists in Washington on 15 May 2006, nonviolence training in Chile in 2004, Smash EDO action in Brighton in 2005.

Photos: WRI archives

Look at the history of your country and you will find episodes of nonviolent action – demonstrations, strikes, boycotts or other forms of popular non-cooperation. The causes will vary – for the rights of workers and peasants, freedom for slaves, the right to vote for women or people without property, for racial equality, for gender equality, for freedom from occupation – in short encompassing a range of forms of injustice and domination. However, it was not until the twentieth century – and in particular the campaigns of Gandhi in South Africa and India – that movements discussed nonviolent action as a conscious strategy for social transformation. Gandhi was convinced that nonviolence had a particular power – both in its effect on the people who took an action, and on those at whom the action was directed. He saw that social solidarity can overcome efforts to dominate, exploit or otherwise oppress a population. It is not just enough to oppose an antagonist, blaming them for everything, but also people have to look at their own responsibilities and their own behaviour – freedom and justice are not just to be demanded but to be practised, and to be the basis on which a movement constructs itself.

Most participants in the campaigns initiated by Gandhi shared only some of his principles – they were prepared to use nonviolence to free India from British colonialism, but few had Gandhi's utter commitment to nonviolence as a way of life, and indeed most conventional political leaders gave only symbolic importance to the constructive programme. This pattern has frequently been repeated, nonviolent action being effective when used by broad movements, where most participants accept nonviolence in practical terms as the appropriate strategy for their situation but only a minority express a philosophical commitment.

The style of nonviolence varies a lot according to context. Since the term 'people power' was coined when the Marcos regime in the Philippines was brought down in 1986, and especially since the downfall of Milosevic in

Serbia in 2000, some observers have talked of an "action template" – meaning popular nonviolent action overthrowing a corrupt and authoritarian regime attempting to win elections by fraud. Of course, there are similarities between the downfall of Milosevic and 'people power' episodes elsewhere. Indeed, some of the Serbs who used nonviolence so creatively against Milosevic have now become involved in training these other movements. However, in each situation, the movements have to make their own analysis of what is appropriate and what will work.

Many people are sceptical about the power of nonviolence against entrenched and brutal regimes. In such situations any resistance is likely to be difficult. Nonviolence does not offer a 'quick fix' in these situations – and neither does armed struggle. Some idealistic movements have turned to armed struggle only to find themselves increasingly separated from the population, depending on extortion and kidnapping to maintain themselves, and in short degenerating into armed bands. Nonviolence aims to work differently. By expanding the social spaces that a movement can occupy, and by giving voice to what the regime requires should not be said, it can set processes of fundamental change in motion. Nonviolent action in the face of torture, 'disappearances' and death squads in various parts of Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s aimed to rebuild a social solidarity that could overcome fear.

Because pacifists refuse to resort to organised violence, we need to invest our creative energy in trying to develop nonviolent alternatives. Therefore, pacifists have a history of playing a vital innovatory role in social movements by developing nonviolent methods of action, both at the level of tactics and in forms of organising. For instance, the first US 'freedom rides' against racial segregation in the 1940s were a pacifist initiative, as was the British nonviolent direct action against nuclear weapons in the 1950s. The creative use of nonviolence of these groups opened spaces

for a much more widespread use of nonviolence by the mass movements that followed.

Later came the introduction of nonviolence training, initially preparing people for the kind of violence that they might meet in nonviolent protests. Subsequently nonviolence training has played an essential role in promoting more participatory forms of movement organisation. Gandhi and Martin Luther King became such towering figures within their own movements that some people have the impression that successful nonviolence depends on 'charismatic' leadership. For us in WRI, however, nonviolent action should be seen as a source of social empowerment – strengthening the capacities of all participants without depending on superhuman leaders. Therefore we have advocated more participatory forms of decision-making, promoted the adoption of forms of organisation based on people grouping into 'affinity groups', and expanded nonviolence training to include tools for the participatory assessment and development of strategy.

We argue that the specific strengths of nonviolent strategies are damaged by any resort to violence. These include strengths among the movement – in fostering trust and solidarity among participants in an action, in putting them in touch with sources of their own power to act in a situation. These strengths also include the relationship of a movement towards its antagonists – in inhibiting their violence or at least ensuring that violent repression will backfire politically against them, and in undermining the 'pillars of power' of an oppressive institution by not treating its employees as inanimate tools but rather trying to create possibilities for them to rethink their allegiances. And finally these strengths include the quality of communication with bystanders or 'outsiders' – people not yet concerned about the issue or not yet active about it, people who can be potential allies.

Howard Clark
Chair of WRI

Editorial

Providing resources to strengthen and deepen our understanding of nonviolence, nonviolent strategies, and nonviolent campaigning is one of the main aims of the Nonviolence Programme. With this Broken Rifle we give you a taste of what you will find in the Handbook for Nonviolent Action that will soon be published by War Resisters' International. The handbook has tools on how to develop nonviolent campaigns and actions, with various resources and stories on international experiences of nonviolent action. Since training plays an important role for successful actions, the handbook includes exercises for helping a group through various learning processes.

The handbook highlights the importance of actions as part of longer term nonviolent campaigns. As Joanne Sheehan says in her article on developing strategic nonviolent campaigns "A campaign is more than projects strung together, or doing the same thing over and over. A campaign is not simply a matter of identifying a problem and using a tactic to address it – such as "a leafleting campaign" or a "campaign of civil disobedience". The power of a nonviolent campaign comes in the creative combination of tactics; the strategic thinking and commitment of the participants".

The handbook will have two versions: one printed, that we hope to make as accessible as possible and a web – version that we hope you will help us update. You can already find the draft version at http://wri-irg.org/wiki/index.php/Nonviolence_Handbook.

Hopefully both The Broken Rifle and the Handbook for Nonviolent Action will be resources used by the WRI network and the broader nonviolent movement. And will contribute to make nonviolence play a major role in the struggle for social change.

Javier Gárate

The Broken Rifle

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Training Exercises

Wars vs Nonviolence

(30 min) 10/10 Strategies – This exercise helps people learn about the rich history of nonviolent campaigns, getting a better understanding of campaigns, tactics and movements. Break into small groups of 5–6. One person in each group needs to list numbers 1 to 10 on a piece of paper. Groups are “competing” with one another to see who can do the task in the fastest time, as opposed to our usual cooperative style. Each group is to list 10 wars as quickly as possible, raising their hands when they are done. Facilitator should note the time. Then ask them to list 10 nonviolent campaigns, and again raise their hands when done. Note how it takes longer to come up with the campaigns than the wars (which we will not talk about here). Starting with the “winning” group, write their list of nonviolent campaigns on a wall chart. Ask other groups to add to the list. (There will probably be a mix of movements, tactics, campaigns, etc. List them all and then use the list to explain the differences so people learn about strategic processes and how effective strategies develop. For example, the list may include “civil rights” (movement), “Nashville” (a campaign) and “sit-ins” (a tactic). Use the list, and the participants as much as possible, to describe components of campaigns, identify tactics, and describe what makes a movement. Use a well known campaign as a case study to learn about strategic development of nonviolent campaigns. Time: Takes 10 minutes for set up, small group exercise and to list on wall chart. Discussion time can be 20 minutes, although could be longer or shorter depending on available time. 30 minutes total works well.

Pillars of Power

Draw an upside down triangle, with pillars holding it up. Write the name of the problem in the triangle (i.e. “war”) and ask the group to describe the institutions that support the problem (i.e. the military, corporations, government policies, support of the population, corporate media, etc.). Identify the underlying principles that hold up the system (i.e. racism, sexism, greed, lies, etc). Describe those institutions. A next step can be to draw another set of pillars, this time putting one of the institutions inside the triangle, and describing what holds that up. Choose the institution that your organization would most likely work to knock down.

What Makes A Campaign Nonviolent?

A campaign is a connected series of activities and actions done over a period of time to achieve specific, stated goals. Campaigns are started by a group of people with a common understanding and vision, who identify the goals and begin the process of research, education and training that strengthens and increases the number of participants who engage in the activities and action.

Demonstrations alone do not end a particular war or correct a deep seated injustice. Faced with the horrors of the world, it’s easy to do the nonviolent equivalent of lashing out – jumping into action or activity without stepping back or looking ahead. Too often groups go directly from recognizing a problem to picking a tactic. Or we suffer from the “paralysis of analysis”, educating ourselves and others, but never getting in to action, and therefore never reaching our goals. The power of a nonviolent campaign comes in the creative combination of tactics, the strategic thinking and commitment of the participants.

What makes a Campaign Nonviolent?

Whether a clear commitment to nonviolence is present or absent, most of the basic steps in campaigns are the same. To be strategic, all campaign organizers need to research and collect information, take part in education and training programmes, develop a strategy that includes multiple tactics to reach their goal. What, then, is unique about a “non-violent campaign”? It’s certainly more than simply not being violent.

Many organizations, campaigns and leaders in nonviolent movements, have statements of their nonviolent principles to explain their perspective. WRI’s Statement of Principles describes what we mean when we say we embrace nonviolence:

“Nonviolence can combine active resistance, including civil disobedience, with dialogue; it can combine non-cooperation – withdrawal of support from a system of oppression – with constructive work to build alternatives. As a way of engaging in conflict, sometimes nonviolence attempts to bring reconciliation with it: strengthening the social fabric, empowering those at the bottom of society, and including people from different sides in seeking a solution. Even when such aims cannot immediately be achieved, our nonviolence holds us firm in our determination not to destroy other people.”

While writing about nonviolent campaigns for the WRI Handbook for Nonviolent Action, I found a variety of descriptions of nonviolent campaigns, usually a mixture of nonviolent principles with common strategies. The following list is meant to identify specific principles that are unique in a nonviolent campaign. While some of these may be found in campaigns that do not identify as being nonviolent, the combination of these principles is what makes a campaign nonviolent.

Principles of Nonviolent Action

We acknowledge the value of each person. This is fundamental, recognizing the dignity and humanity of oneself and others. We refuse to mistreat our opponent as an enemy.

We recognize that we all have part of the truth; no one has all of it. No one is all “right” or all “wrong”. Our campaign information gathering, education and actions should reflect this.

Our actions are open to anyone – no restrictions of gender, age, ability, etc. We need to be careful that we are truly open to the



War Resisters' International at anti-war demonstration.

Photo: WRI

full participation of all and that we do not mirror the discrimination found in society.

We accept suffering but cause none to others. Accepting suffering is a principle based on the value of each person, and a strategy that draws attention to our commitment and our cause. We will not violently fight back if attacked. We recognize jail may be a consequence of our actions; filling the jails may be a strategy.

Our means (behaviors, actions) are consistent with our ends (of affirming life, opposing oppression and seek justice, valuing every person). Our strategy must be based on this principle, we cannot justify a “victory” obtained through violent, coercive, or deceitful methods.

Believing in the transformative power of nonviolence, we prefer conversion rather than coercion. We work for win-win rather than win-lose solutions. The combination of respect for our opponents’ human rights and objection to their violating our rights can make them move.

Our actions emphasize openness to promote communication and democratic processes. We work for processes that express “power with” not “power over” others. The empowerment of all involved in the campaign is important. We promote democratic structures (internal and external) to maximize self-determination.

We maintain discipline to agree upon guidelines and preparation before taking action. Going back to the Code of Discipline laid down by Gandhi in the 1930’s, many campaigns have developed “nonviolence guidelines” which all participants are asked to agree to. To ensure these are followed, participants may be encouraged to participate in nonviolence training or orientation for an action.

“Nonviolence guidelines” are not the same as nonviolent principles. They are agreements on how participants in an action will behave. They may be stated in very practical terms (“We will not carry any weapons.”) or may be written in more philosophical terms (“We will gather together in a manner that reflects the world we choose to create.”)

In any nonviolent campaign there will be people with varied levels of commitment to nonviolence. Nonviolence guidelines make it clear what is expected and sets a nonviolent spirit for the action. In the midst of an action, it is easy for the crowd’s tone to move in the direction of verbal abuse and even violence.

Infiltrators may attempt to discredit the group by urging people to act violently. Nonviolent agreements, and nonviolence training, can make it possible for a large number of people to participate in a campaign nonviolently, even if they have little experience in this area. No matter how committed the organizers are to the principles of nonviolent action, and how well the campaign strategy is organised, it is crucial that the participants in the demonstrations and civil disobedience actions can reflect the principles of nonviolence for it to be an effective nonviolent campaign.

A nonviolent campaign takes people through processes of empowerment. It should be personally empowering — people discovering and exercising their own power against oppression, exclusion, and violence, and for participation, peace and human rights. Groups working on a campaign develop a collective power, learning how to be organisers and become political strategists in the process. Multiple campaigns can move us towards social empowerment that leads to the social transformation we are working for. In our training and planning we need to consider all aspects of this nonviolent social empowerment process: personal empowerment, community power, people power.

Examples of nonviolence guidelines:

Faslane 365:

http://www.faslane365.org/fr/display_preview/nonviolence_guidelines

Lakenheath Action Group:

<http://www.motherearth.org/lakenheathaction/nv.php3>

School of the Americas Watch:

<http://www.soaw.org/article.php?id=1093>

Joanne Sheehan

Brainstorming

Why we choose nonviolence?

Brainstorming is a group technique designed to generate a large number of ideas in a limited amount of time. Most of us have probably used brainstorming in our political work to develop descriptions (i.e. What is nonviolence?) or answer questions with as many ideas as possible to consider (i.e. What tactics would help us reach our goals?). It is a good tool to use at meetings and nonviolence training as it gets people energised by the flow of answers. It also helps to listen to more voices within the group.

Here are 4 recommendations for holding a brainstorming session:

1. Focus on quantity: The assumption is that the greater the number of ideas generated, the greater the chance of producing a radical and effective solution.

2. No criticism: It is often emphasized that in group brainstorming, criticism should be put 'on hold'. Instead of immediately stating what might be wrong with an idea, the participants focus on extending or adding to it, reserving criticism for a later 'critical stage' of the process. By suspending judgement, one creates a supportive atmosphere where participants feel free to generate unusual ideas.

3. Unusual ideas are welcome: To get a good and long list of ideas, unusual ideas are welcomed. They may open new ways of thinking and provide better solutions than regular ideas. They can be generated by looking from another perspective or setting aside assumptions.

4. Combine and improve ideas: Good ideas can be combined to form a single very good idea, as suggested by the slogan "1+1=3". This approach is assumed to lead to better and more complete ideas than merely generating new ideas alone. It is believed to stimulate the building of ideas by a process of association.

Following the theme on this Broken Rifle we held an electronic brainstorm via WRI's list-serves. We asked the question:

"Why is it important that protest groups take the strategic choice in favour of non-violent methods?"

Here are the answers we received:

Because, irrespective of strategy it is important a principled choice is made, particularly when our resistance is tested to the utmost. (Gwyn)

Because if the means are not nonviolent the ends will not be (Chris)

- ▶ *Because of respect of life and dignity of everyone including the opponent*
- ▶ *So that in case the other side chooses to respond violently, the protest group has not given them an easy legitimisation to do so, and thereby shows to the wider public observing what is happening who is right and who is wrong.*
- ▶ *Because nonviolent methods have a much larger range of possibilities and options, and are often just the better ones. (Christine)*

Just because two simple issues: legitimacy and effectiveness. The legitimacy is important because the battlefield is inside a communicative ambit, and using nonviolence you are showing to the public opinion your protest is legitimate. The effectiveness of nonviolence comes from an analysis of power that means that violence creates another power structure that will need some kind of future domination, if we don't want to become the same



Nonviolence training in Chile. Photo: Andreas Speck

thing as we are fighting against we must use nonviolence. (Cthuchi)

- ▶ *Nonviolence because it helps us all win. Violence imposes the will of one on another, leaving one a winner and the other defeated.*
- ▶ *Because violence hasn't been shown to work. How much more research do we need? Let's try a nonviolent experiment. Please.*
- ▶ *Because violence has created the mess we're in. Seems only logical that nonviolence is what will get us out. (Denise)*

"We are nonviolent because an injury to one is an injury to all." (Bayard Rustin quoted)

One of my frequently used arguments is that "we" could be wrong (talking from personal experiences here) and I want to have the option to reverse my actions. Difficult if you have killed someone. (Jørgen)

More people can be involved, whatever their age or physical ability; less secrecy is necessary; nonviolent actions don't cause as much fear or alienation from third parties; means are consistent with ends; nonviolence is often more effective; heightens the contrast with the violence of the system/repression; respects life. (Vivien)

At least, there will be some survivors. (Ugur)

Violence and legal protest are sometimes effective but fundamentally political traps, making you fight for your rights on the terms of the powerful. Nonviolent resistance against power structures and building the new society with constructive work are methods that uses the power of the people and does it on our own terms, where we are the strongest, they the weakest; building legitimacy, cooperation, community and communication; i.e. that which creates and maintains human relationships, i.e. society. (Stellan)

Wrapping up

When you are present with a group doing a brainstorming session, when all the ideas are up on the wall, ask if there is anything up there that people have a question about, or that they disagree with. Open this up for discussion. You may not need to come to consensus on a brainstorming session. (At a training session, you are not trying to come up with a definition to answer "What is nonviolence?").

Or you may want to sort out the answers for further discussion. (The brainstorming gave the group lots of tactics, now you need to choose the best ones. You can do that by creating a "matrix", listing the tactics down one side/ the goals along the top, and check to see if the tactic with a positive (+), a negative (-), or neutral (0) for helping to reach the goal of the action.)

After you get the different answers from a brainstorming, you can organise them into categories to help you identify some of the main issues. For example in this brainstorming, we can state that some of the main reasons why to choose nonviolent methods:

As a principle: If we want a peaceful and just world the means to reach it need to be peaceful.

Effectiveness: Nonviolence has shown to be effective in many cases, violence has mainly led to more violence.

Respect for others: Respect for life, your opponents and your own group.

Group process: Welcomes all voices and their active participation.

Independence: Working in our own terms instead of working for someone else's power.

After identifying the main issues you can use other tools to analyse them in more depth, for example the Pillars of Power presented in this Broken Rifle. We encourage you to use brainstorming in your campaign work. In most cases you will get useful ideas while giving everyone a chance to participate and have a good time!

Consensus decision making

Organising for nonviolent action is (often) based on affinity groups, autonomous groups of 5–15 persons where people trust each other and can rely on each other (see the article on affinity groups).

Consensus decision making differs greatly from majority decision making. While majority decision making often leads to a power struggle between two different solutions, consensus decision making aims to take everyone's concerns on board, often modifying a proposed solution several times in the process. It is very much based on listening and respect, and participation by everyone.

Consensus levels

Consensus does not necessarily mean that all agree 100% – while this might be the optimum, it is in practice often not the case. It is therefore important that everyone in the group is aware of different levels of support or non-support that can be given to a certain proposal:

Non-support: "I don't see the need for this, but I'll go along with it."

Standing aside: "I personally can't do this, but I won't stop others from doing it." The person standing aside is not responsible for the consequences. This should be recorded in the minutes.

Veto/major objection: A single veto/major objection blocks the proposal from passing. If you have a major objection it means that you cannot live with the proposal if it passes. It is so objectionable to you/those you are representing that you will stop the proposal. A major objection isn't an "I don't really like it" or "I liked the other idea better." It is an "I cannot live with this proposal if it passes, and here is why?!" The group can either accept the veto or discuss the issue further and draw up new proposals. The veto is a powerful tool and should be used with caution.

Agree to disagree: the group decides that no agreement can be reached on this issue.

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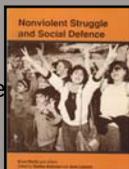
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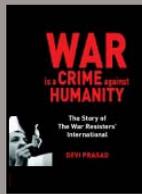
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Nonviolence in South Korea

It has not been long since the concept of "nonviolent way of struggle" started to be used in the Korean social movement society. Still, many people in social movements have a negative feeling about this concept. They regard "nonviolence" as a weak, passive and non-resistant way of struggle, and those perceptions seem to have come from the somewhat unique history that many Koreans have experienced.

In South Korea there had been over 30 years of authoritarian regime by the military after the Japanese colonial period and the Korean War. During that time people came to have intense aspirations towards liberty and democracy and many of them started to resist against the Korean government. The Korean government responded to the people in a way of terror, mobilizing their armed forces. Under those circumstances, it was considered natural for people to resist the government in violent ways. They armed themselves and called their violence "resistant violence".

Nowadays, the state still frequently uses violence against people, especially the violation of people's human rights by police at demonstrations. Many activists think that there's no other way except "violent struggle", and that "nonviolent struggle" is not an effective tactic.

Nevertheless, "nonviolent struggle" is being accepted among some working groups in Korea, as "peace" and "nonviolence" is. "Nonviolent way of struggling" has had an influence on the people who don't agree with violent resistance.

There has been a kind of nonviolent way of resisting since 1980s, such as the students' objection to being in the forefront where they should aim at the north, the soldiers and combat polices proclamation that reveals the whole violence they have experienced in the period of



Anti flag swearing direct action.

Photo: Jungmin

military service and the civil objection to questioning by patrolman.

But the concept of "nonviolence" in those contexts was rather close to just a means of resisting.

In Korean society, conscientious objectors to mandatory military service are said to be the first sincere pacifists who take nonviolence as a philosophy of life. Conscientious objectors have advocated the right to refuse to unreasonable orders from the state, where nationalism and militarism is prevalent, and they have appealed to the people's good nature, making them contemplate the military, arms and the war fundamentally. People were deeply moved when they saw conscientious objectors willing go into prison for 18 months rather than take arms.

They have come to know the significance of conscientious objectors performance as they watch continual wars caused by U.S. and Israel.

The working group for conscientious objection in Korea is now focusing on giving necessary assistance, such as legal and psychological counseling, to those who prepare to object. It also focuses on having people become aware of the meaning of conscientious objection through variety of activities such as press conferences, forums, campaigns and direct actions. The number of conscientious objectors in Korea is still small and the punishment COs are given is excessive, therefore it is very important to support them constantly, so they will not feel isolated.

Influenced by the movement of conscientious objection, there are many alternative groups now taking nonviolent pacifism as a principal philosophy of their struggle. These groups play an important part in the struggle against US base extension in Pyeongtaek. They are using their creative imagination to develop

diverse tactics and nonviolent direct action, making a striking contrast to the previous way of struggle.

These "new" working groups are currently carrying out the "making peaceful village" project. They are trying to change the old house, where residents have left after the negotiation with Korean government, into a library, cafe and guesthouse full of works of art, with help from many artists. This year, there have been several crack downs by the military and police. But many people have performed nonviolent direct actions to protect the village, such as making a barricade with no arms, having sits-in on the excavator, and those tactics worked. Even though mainstream media was not interested in those nonviolent struggles, many people know what happened in the Pyeongtaek area and give support to the struggle against the US base extension.

Until now, nonviolence was not a principal philosophy in the Korean movement society. When Kang Chul-min, who was in active military service, declared his conscientious objection in 2003, there was a conflict of opinions whether the sit-down demonstration should go on or not. And there was also a problem when many university students declared pre-conscientious objection following their group's command. Those problems resulted because groups thought of conscientious objection as just a matter of tactics or even an event, not a direct action in one person's own life. Now there are more and more people who are taking up the nonviolent way in the anti-US base enlargement struggle.

Korea Solidarity for Conscientious Objection

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