

# ***Nonviolence speaks: communicating against repression***

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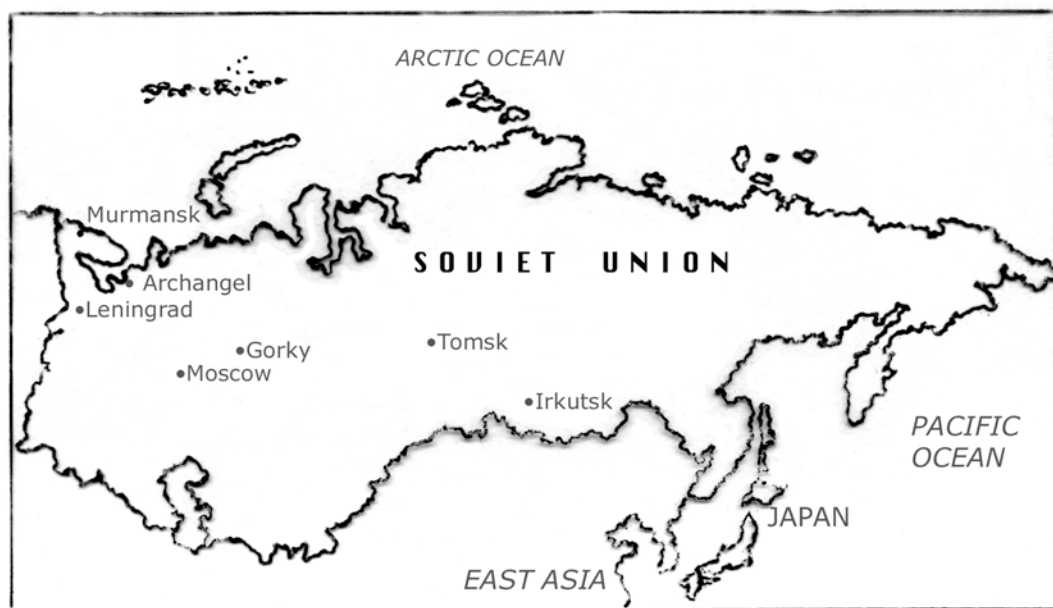
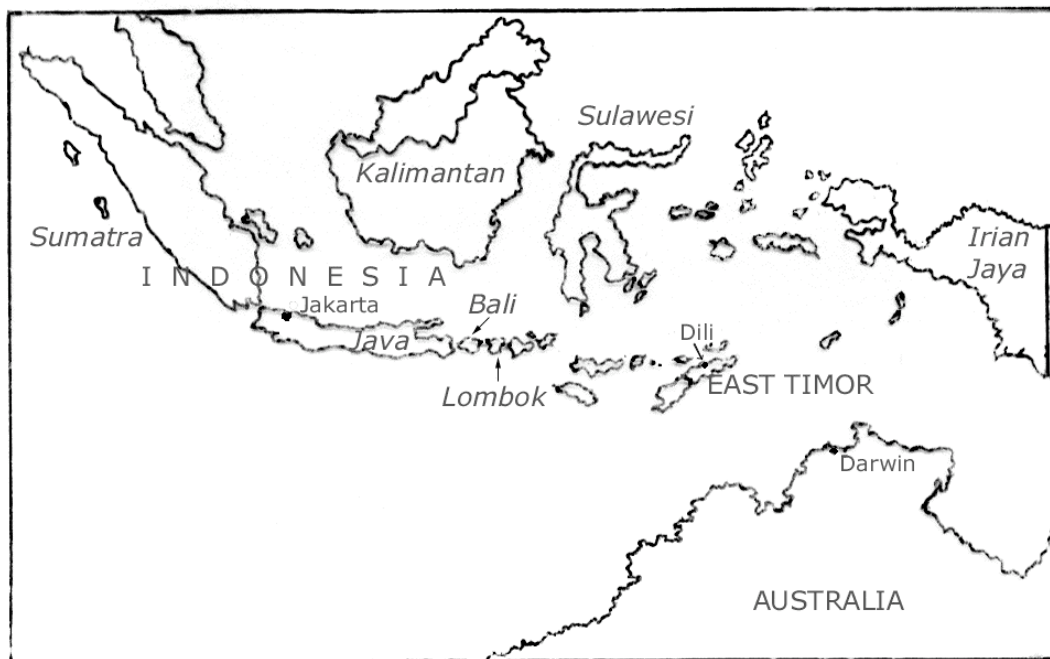
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# 1

## Introduction

Rallies, strikes, boycotts, sit-ins, and other methods of people's action without violence have a tremendous potential to challenge aggression, repression, and oppression. However, governments give this approach almost no resources and the mass media give it little attention compared to the vast expenditures and saturation coverage given to violent methods of handling conflict. Therefore, it is vital to learn as much as possible from the experiences of nonviolent action that do occur.

Communication plays a crucial role in any conflict. How can communication be used to support popular nonviolent action and to make this a more effective method of struggle? Our task in this book is to address that question.

We can learn something about the strength of nonviolent action and the role played by communication by recalling the situation in the Philippines after 1972 when President Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law and clamped down on opponents. Opposing forces included an armed insurgency and various civilian social movements and critics. In 1983, leading opposition politician Benigno Aquino was murdered. This act, attributed to Marcos forces, mobilized sections of the Philippine elite, including the Catholic Church, businesses, and politicians, to oppose the government. As pressure for change increased, Marcos called a snap election to be held in February 1986. Left-wing opposition groups called for a boycott of the election since they anticipated voting fraud by the government. Nevertheless, most people voted anyway, and most of the votes were for Cory Aquino, widow of Benigno Aquino.

As predicted, there was extensive voting fraud and Marcos declared himself the winner. However, the fraud was so blatant that it was easily exposed by poll observers and the international media. The Catholic Bishops' Conference condemned the poll fraud, as did many foreign governments. On 16 February, a million people turned out on the streets of the capital, Manila, to protest. Aquino called for a civil disobedience campaign involving strikes, boycotts, delayed payment of bills, and regular

vocal protests. This was taken up enthusiastically.

As popular resistance continued over the next several days, a section of the military planned an anti-Marcos coup. As forces loyal to Marcos were mobilized to crush the uprising, the military rebels called on popular support. Leaders of the popular resistance put out a call and an enormous crowd surrounded the rebel soldiers in Metro Manila. Troops and pilots loyal to Marcos would not attack the unarmed civilians, who thus provided protection for the rebels.

The mass protest was impromptu but well organized. Training in techniques of civilian protest had taken place throughout the country for some years. As the mass rally in Manila continued for days, religious groups coordinated food distribution. Nuns were pressured to go on the front lines; their presence worked to get oncoming tanks to stop. Influential church leaders discouraged violence by participants. Independent radio broadcasts helped to coordinate activities.

The mass people's action caused more and more troops to defect to the rebels. However, the rebel leaders, having pledged loyalty to Aquino and fearing the power of the people, could not easily move to form a military government, so after four days of mass action Aquino became president and Marcos left the country. This political transition is called the "EDSA Revolution" after Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (EDSA), where the massive demonstrations occurred on 24–27 February. The amazing display of popular action against a repressive regime is also called "people power."<sup>1</sup>

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1 Anne Mackenzie, "People power or palace coup: the fall of Marcos," in Mark Turner (ed.), *Regime Change in the Philippines: The Legitimation of the Aquino Government* (Canberra: Department of Political and Social Change, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, 1987), pp. 1–57; Sterling Seagrave, *The Marcos Dynasty* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); Mark R. Thompson, *The Anti-Marcos Struggle: Person-*

The events in the Philippines are far from the only example of large-scale nonviolent action. Some others — including both successes and failures — are:

- the toppling of Serbian ruler Slobodan Milosevic in 2000;
- the East Timorese urban resistance to Indonesian occupation, culminating in independence in 1999;<sup>2</sup>
- the removal of the racist and oppressive apartheid system in South Africa in the 1990s;<sup>3</sup>
- civil resistance to Serbian rule in Kosovo in the 1990s;<sup>4</sup>
- resistance to the repressive regime in Burma, 1980s and 1990s;<sup>5</sup>
- collapse in 1989 of repressive Eastern European regimes;<sup>6</sup>

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*alistic Rule and Democratic Transition in the Philippines* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995); Stephen Zunes, “The origins of people power in the Philippines,” in Stephen Zunes, Lester R. Kurtz, and Sarah Beth Asher (eds.), *Nonviolent Social Movements: A Geographical Perspective* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 129–157. For events outside Manila, see Benedict J. Kerkvliet and Resil B. Mojares (eds.), *From Marcos to Aquino: Local Perspectives on Political Transition in the Philippines* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1991; Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992). While people power was impressive in ending the Marcos dictatorship, subsequent developments did not live up to this promising start. The Aquino government continued many of the same policies, and the crucial problems of gross inequality, corruption, and exploitation continued.

2 Chisako M. Fukuda, “Peace through nonviolent action: the East Timorese resistance movement’s strategy for engagement,” *Pacifica Review*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2000, pp. 16–31.

3 Stephen Zunes, “The role of non-violent action in the downfall of apartheid,” *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 1999, pp. 137–169.

4 Howard Clark, *Civil Resistance in Kosovo* (London: Pluto, 2000).

5 Aung San Suu Kyi (conversations with Alan Clements), *The Voice of Hope* (London: Penguin, 1997).

- the Chinese pro-democracy movement, crushed in the 1989 Beijing massacre;<sup>7</sup>
- the Palestinian intifada, 1987–1993, a popular resistance to the Israeli occupation;<sup>8</sup>
- direct action against nuclear power, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, in many countries;<sup>9</sup>
- Czechoslovak resistance to the 1968 Soviet invasion;<sup>10</sup>
- the collapse of the Algerian Generals’ revolt in 1961 due to noncooperation in Algeria and France;<sup>11</sup>
- the US civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s;<sup>12</sup>

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6 Michael Randle, *People Power: The Building of a New European Home* (Stroud: Hawthorn, 1991).

7 Scott Simmie and Bob Nixon, *Tiananmen Square: An Eyewitness Account of the Chinese People’s Passionate Quest for Democracy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1989).

8 Souad R. Dajani, *Eyes Without Country: Searching for a Palestinian Strategy of Liberation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Andrew Rigby, *Living the Intifada* (London: Zed Books, 1991).

9 Barbara Epstein, *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution: Nonviolent Direct Action in the 1970s and 1980s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Wolfgang Rüdig, *Anti-Nuclear Movements: A World Survey of Opposition to Nuclear Energy* (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1990).

10 H. Gordon Skilling, *Czechoslovakia’s Interrupted Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976); Philip Windsor and Adam Roberts, *Czechoslovakia 1968: Reform, Repression and Resistance* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1969).

11 Adam Roberts, “Civil resistance to military coups,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 1975, pp. 19–36.

12 Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954–1963* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988); Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963–65* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998); David Halberstam, *The Children* (New York: Random House, 1998); Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin Luther*

- refusal by Norwegian teachers in 1942 to teach Nazi doctrine;<sup>13</sup>

- Indian independence struggles led by Gandhi, 1920s to 1940s.<sup>14</sup>

The common theme in these and other cases is that people take direct action to oppose aggression, repression, and oppression. Non-violent action is the power of people without weapons in the conventional sense. To undertake armed struggle might be to engage in aggression or repression themselves. Instead, nonviolent action relies on rallies, marches, vigils, strikes, boycotts, sit-ins, and a host of other techniques that do not physically harm others.

From a conventional military or police perspective, these sorts of methods should have no chance against armed forces.<sup>15</sup> Yet there are dozens of cases where nonviolent action has worked as well as, or better than, armed force. Western military strength did not cause the collapse of Eastern European communist regimes; indeed, it can be argued that the Western military threat provided a convenient justification for Eastern European military strength and internal repression. The

regimes maintained their full repressive apparatus, including police, prisons, and extensive surveillance of the population. Military and police power were intact. What the regimes lost in 1989 was legitimacy.

Consider East Germany, one of the most highly militarized and tightly controlled of the East European regimes, with an extensive internal spying apparatus, as was revealed after the collapse. A key factor was that the international situation had changed dramatically: the Soviet government, in the throes of glasnost and perestroika, no longer guaranteed support for East European regimes. Even so, the East German government seemed to have everything it needed to maintain power.

In this case, nonviolent action worked its transformation through two main channels.<sup>16</sup> First, after Hungary opened its border to the west, thousands of East Germans began emigrating via Hungary. This exodus could not be hidden since it was broadcast on West German television. The massive emigration severely dented the credibility of the regime, which had long claimed to be superior to the decadent west. Second, there were small rallies in opposition to the government, which within a few weeks became enormous rallies. This public display of opposition also undermined the credibility of the government.

In this crisis, East German political leaders had two main choices: they could call out troops to attack the rallies, or they could capitulate. Calling out the troops seems obvious enough, but it had major drawbacks. It would have meant a major confrontation, and possibly many civilian deaths and injuries, very likely leading to a tremendous increase in support for the opposition movement. Indeed, so rapidly was support for the opposition growing that it was uncertain whether troops would have been willing to act, even if ordered.

The regime was prepared for a military attack and prepared for western spying. It was

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King, Jr. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969).

13 Jacques Semelin, *Unarmed Against Hitler: Civilian Resistance in Europe 1939–1943* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993).

14 Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989); Dennis Dalton, *Mahatma Gandhi: Nonviolent Power in Action* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); M. K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or the Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1927); Gene Sharp, *Gandhi as a Political Strategist* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1979). We thank Tom Weber for advice on Gandhi references.

15 A common argument against nonviolence is that it won't work against ruthless opponents. However, this argument has fundamental flaws: "failures" historically may be due to not trying nonviolence at all or not doing it well enough. See Ralph Summy, "Nonviolence and the case of the extremely ruthless opponent," *Pacifica Review*, Vol. 6, No. 1, May-June 1994, pp. 1–29.

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16 We draw here on Roland Bleiker, *Nonviolent Struggle and the Revolution in East Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Albert Einstein Institution, 1993).

not prepared for nonviolent action. Caught unprepared, East German government leaders opted to resign rather than fight. The incredibly repressive regime was brought down without a fight in a process that was a surprise to nearly everyone, including western military analysts and foreign affairs specialists. In military and government circles, nonviolent action simply was not understood as a method of opposing repressive regimes.

In the years since, it remains the case that few people in government understand nonviolent action, much less promote it. Foreign policy continues to be run on the basis of government-to-government interaction, whether this takes the form of cooperation, competition, or confrontation. The idea of encouraging nonviolent action to undermine repressive regimes or promote social reform lies idle. It is only outside government circles, among people's movements, that the transformative potential of nonviolent action is taken seriously.

Our aim is to seek insights into how to make nonviolent action more effective. There is a large amount of writing and practical experience about nonviolent action in practice, dealing with analysis, preparation, training, methods, tactics, and strategy.<sup>17</sup> Our special

interest is in the role of communication, which has been largely neglected in previous studies. Consider again the 1989 events in East Germany. A crucial factor in the regime's loss of legitimacy was West German broadcasts about both emigration and rallies. There were many people who opposed the regime, but individually they were afraid to act. When they found out, through television broadcasts, that others were resisting, many of them were emboldened to join the action.

Communication is crucial in both maintaining and undermining a repressive regime's legitimacy, in coordinating or disrupting resistance, and in contacting sympathizers in other parts of the world. In addition, many of the methods of nonviolent action, such as vigils, rallies, and sit-ins, are themselves forms of communication. So it can be said that nonviolent action relies on effective communication and *is* communication too.

Our primary concern is with communication as a means to support challenges to

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17 For accounts of nonviolent action, see for example Peter Ackerman and Jack DuVall, *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), which gives treatments of several of the case studies above, among others; Robert Cooney and Helen Michalowski (eds.), *The Power of the People: Active Nonviolence in the United States* (Philadelphia: New Society Press, 1987); Ralph E. Crow, Philip Grant, and Saad E. Ibrahim (eds.), *Arab Nonviolent Political Struggle in the Middle East* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1990); Staughton Lynd and Alice Lynd (eds.), *Nonviolence in America: A Documentary History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995); Pam McAllister, *The River of Courage: Generations of Women's Resistance and Action* (Philadelphia: New Society Press, 1991); Philip McManus and Gerald Schlabach (eds.), *Relentless Persistence: Nonviolent Action in Latin America* (Philadelphia: New Society Press, 1991); Yeshua Moser-Puangsuwan and Thomas Weber (eds.), *Nonviolent Intervention across Borders: A*

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*Recurrent Vision* (Honolulu, HI: Spark M. Matsunaga Institute for Peace, University of Hawai'i, 2000); Roger S. Powers and William B. Vogeles (eds.), *Protest, Power, and Change: An Encyclopedia of Nonviolent Action from ACT-UP to Women's Suffrage* (New York: Garland, 1997); Paul Wehr, Heidi Burgess, and Guy Burgess (eds.), *Justice Without Violence* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1994); Zunes et al., *Nonviolent Social Movements*, as well as sources cited earlier. Ronald M. McCarthy and Gene Sharp, *Nonviolent Action: A Research Guide* (New York: Garland, 1997) is an annotated bibliography, mostly of books, covering cases of nonviolent struggle around the world as well as methods and dynamics of nonviolent action and theoretical works on power, conflict, and violence.

For practical material see Howard Clark, Sheryl Crown, Angela McKee, and Hugh MacPherson, *Preparing for Nonviolent Direct Action* (Nottingham: Peace News/CND, 1984); Virginia Coover, Ellen Deacon, Charles Esser, and Christopher Moore, *Resource Manual for a Living Revolution* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1981); Per Hørgren, *Path of Resistance: The Practice of Civil Disobedience* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1993); Martin Jelfs, *Manual for Action* (London: Action Resources Group, 1982).

systems of power. Communication can also be used to promote change at the interpersonal and small group level, for example to move from the mode of blaming and criticizing to the mode of expressing oneself and listening to others empathetically. While efforts at this level are extremely important,<sup>18</sup> they are not our focus of attention.

### **When action is absent or at a lower level**

Action is tremendously enticing. Television news is filled with action, in many cases involving violence and death, such as wars, natural disasters, and accidents. Nonviolent action can be exciting and newsworthy too, such as pickets, freeway blockades, or massive rallies.

However, the continual focus on action often obscures something that is vitally important: absence or lower levels of action. There is a picket line today, but there wasn't one last week. There is a blockade on the southern freeway but not on other freeways. There is a massive rally about the war in Serbia but not one about the war in Ethiopia.<sup>19</sup>

That does not mean that activists are not working away in these areas. Their efforts may not yet have led to actions that are perceived as noteworthy. Indeed there is no guarantee that these actions will reach such levels, for there are numerous barriers to action and, for action to reach the levels evident in, say, "people power" in the Philippines, barriers need to be overcome. That actions of lesser visibility can easily be misunderstood for no action at all partly has to do with the media.

In the mass media, there is an implicit scale of what is considered newsworthy. Other things being equal, violent action usually gets more coverage than nonviolent action: thousands of people may join a protest march, but if just a few get in a fight or smash windows, they are likely to gain just as much media coverage as the thousands who didn't. Similarly, some types of nonviolent action are more newsworthy: a sit-in dramatizes a conflict more than a boycott; a mock funeral is more visible than social ostracism.

If violent and visible actions are more newsworthy than nonviolent and diffuse ones, then even further down the scale is the everyday campaigning aimed mainly at trying to raise people's level of awareness and convince them that involvement in resistance is worthwhile. This can involve talking amongst friends, small group meetings, writing about issues, trying to promote nonviolent solutions among acquaintances, suggesting relevant books for libraries, teach-ins, leafleting, stickers, graffiti, individual stands as an example to others, and other forms of campaigning, often local. These are seldom a focus of attention, whether by media or anyone else, including nonviolent activists. If there is a war — especially one involving or close to the dominant western states — then it is likely to be a focus of attention. Little notice is given to those regions of the world where there isn't a war, terrorism, or famine, or at least a prospect of violence or suffering.

It is important to acknowledge that resistance to aggression, repression, and oppression occurs all the time in all sorts of ways, large and small. Even in situations of severe repression, such as slavery or Nazi death camps, there are expressions and acts of autonomy, defiance, and insubordination.<sup>20</sup> Subtle uses of language and gestures can express resistance, as can religious ceremonies, songs, styles of

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18 See especially Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Compassion* (Del Mar, CA: PuddleDancer Press, 1999). See also the many books by Suzette Haden Elgin on the gentle art of verbal self-defense, for example *How to Disagree without Being Disagreeable: Getting Your Point Across with the Gentle Art of Verbal Self-Defense* (New York: Wiley, 1997).

19 Any example we use is bound to become out of date.

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20 Roland Bleiker, *Popular Dissent, Human Agency and Global Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

work, and a host of other aspects of everyday life. Resistance is possible, and routinely occurs, in every conceivable circumstance.

Nevertheless, because there is no guarantee that the momentum will build, we need to reflect on how, when, and under what circumstances these everyday resistances give rise to larger, more capable challenges. We need to face the hard reality of sometimes misplaced efforts in somewhat futile actions and to ask what could have occurred but didn't or could be occurring but isn't. There were massive rallies challenging the Marcos dictatorship in 1986 but no rallies of a similar scale in 1985 or preceding years. There were massive rallies against the East German government in October and November 1989 but not a few months earlier. We want to illuminate the path between the lower levels of action and much greater levels of action.

## Words

We use the standard expression in writings in this area, "nonviolent action," which is defined in contrast to violent action, which includes killing, beating, torture, and imprisonment — essentially, the use of physical force against humans. Nonviolent action refers to collective action that excludes physical violence, and thus includes occupations, pray-ins, work-to-rule, deputations, severing diplomatic relations, refusal to disperse, boycotts of elections, refusal to pay debts, picketing, slogans, protest emigration, mock awards, and a host of other methods.<sup>21</sup> The concept of nonviolent action however normally excludes routine actions such as buying goods, talking to co-workers, or building a house. These are all nonviolent, but generally are not intended to bring about social change.

Another term for nonviolent action is Gandhi's expression *satyagraha*, which translated literally means "truth-force."

Our main interest is in nonviolent action to challenge aggression, repression, and oppression. The most important type of aggression

relevant here is military attack, noting that what is normally called "military defense" often involves attack. Repression refers to military or police attacks on or control of a population, for example through arrest, imprisonment, surveillance, beatings, torture, and killing. Oppression refers to social systems involving exploitation or inequality. In each case we are primarily concerned with collective rather than solely interpersonal behavior.

Aggression, repression, and oppression are often interlinked. Consider for example the Soviet people during World War II. The Soviet Union suffered from military attack by Nazi Germany; the Soviet government responded with military defense and, eventually, counterattack. The Soviet government repressed the Soviet population under its control with killings, imprisonment, and forced population transfers. Finally, The Soviet working class was oppressed by the Soviet regime: workers were denied any voice in how their factories, farms, and the country were run, and their work was exploited to benefit the privileged Communist Party elite. Oppression is often backed up by repression or the threat of aggression.

The term "action" refers to people doing things, which potentially includes everything from talking to fighting. Our primary interest is in nonviolent action, as described above. More challenging is the concept of "absence of action." One way of looking at this is that people are always doing something, so that "absence of action" is a contradiction in terms. It is possible, though, to talk sensibly about absence of particular types of action in particular circumstances, such as there being no rallies of more than a thousand people in a particular city over a certain period. In this sense, every situation has an absence of action: only some actions are taken and there is an absence of other actions.

Even the most energetic activists cannot do everything at the same time. If people are locked in prison, obviously they cannot be on the street protesting. The sorts of constraints that interest us are those that are not physical. People in Manila could have left their homes and joined a rally just as readily in 1985 as in

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21 Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973), pp. 107–445.



1986 — though of course the consequences might have been quite different. By the same token, even in 1986 only some of the population joined the rally in Manila, so while there was certainly plenty of action, in principle there could have been an even greater level of participation.

In this sense, inaction on the part of some people is something that is around us all the time. There are numerous social problems, including military dictatorships, male domination, capitalist exploitation of workers, and assaults on the environment. Resistance occurs in many ways, to be sure, but not everyone is resisting all the time in every possible way, hence lack of sufficiently effective resistance is an issue.

Our aim in focusing on areas of no action and less visible action is to learn better how to promote action against repression, aggression, and oppression. In other words, as well as studying nonviolent action in order to learn how to improve nonviolent action, it can be worthwhile to study episodes of absence of action, low level action, and “dormant” potential for action.

### Why nonviolent action is needed

To study and promote nonviolent action is to go against the grain. Most people’s normal assumption is that defense and human rights are the responsibility of governments or of international bodies such as the United Nations. Courts are supposed to ensure that justice is done. Governments have both the formal mandate to deal with major problems and enormous resources to undertake the task. Furthermore, in an age of professionalization and specialization, the standard assumption is that social problems should be dealt with by experts and specialist agencies.

Yet there is ample evidence that enormous problems continue and that governments are responsible for many of them. In spite of peacekeeping forces, there are dozens of wars around the globe. In spite of the end of the Cold War, military spending remains at an extraordinarily high level. The possibility of nuclear, biological, and chemical warfare

remains, and so-called “conventional weapons” are being made more deadly all the time. Indeed, there is massive research into ever more effective ways to kill, maim, control, and manipulate people. Although not a single government admits to using torture, dozens of them do in practice.

The United Nations has not provided a solution. It is dominated by governments and is virtually powerless to act without support by the greatest powers. Since the UN was set up after the end of World War II, and human rights agreements signed, genocide and politicide (mass killings for political reasons) have continued, including the Soviet Union 1943–1950, China 1950–1951 and 1966–1975, Indonesia 1965–1966, Pakistan 1971, Cambodia 1975–1979, Afghanistan 1978–1979, Sudan from 1983, Iraq from 1990, and Rwanda 1994. In each of these cases, the death toll exceeded half a million.<sup>22</sup> As well, there are numerous other cases of brutal repression, such as in Central and South America: Argentina, Chile, Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and others. The UN has been useless or worse in terms of stopping genocide.<sup>23</sup>

Another major set of problems is starvation, malnutrition, poverty, economic exploitation, and increasing inequality globally. As the world’s productive capacities increase, inequality is increasing both between countries and within countries. Associated problems include occupational injury and death, prostitution, and slavery.

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22 Barbara Harff and Ted Robert Gurr, “Victims of the state: genocides, politicides and group repression from 1945 to 1995,” in Albert J. Jongman (ed), *Contemporary Genocides: Causes, Cases, Consequences* (Leiden: Projecten Interdisciplinair Onderzoek naar de Oorzaken van Mensenrechtenschendingen, 1996), pp. 33–58. The inclusion of Iraq may seem anomalous. For the case that the death of one or two million Iraqis as a result of sanctions is a form of mass killing, see Geoff Simons, *The Scourging of Iraq: Sanctions, Law and Natural Justice* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998, 2nd ed.)

23 Leo Kuper, *Genocide* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981).

This recitation of the world's problems could be extended at great length, but the basic point is clear enough. The problems are enormous, but governments and international bodies, which are supposed to be responsible for fixing them, are either ineffectual or actually the cause of the problems.

Nonviolent action is an alternative that is deeply threatening to governments. While hundreds of billions of dollars are spent on military forces and weapons every year, hardly any support is available to educate and train citizens in nonviolent methods of struggle. While billions of dollars are spent on military research, hardly any is spent on researching nonviolent struggle. The reason is straightforward: if citizens learn skills in how to be more effective in protest, noncooperation, and nonviolent intervention, then they might use those skills not just against repressive governments somewhere else, but also closer to home, for example against exploitative corporations or unresponsive government departments.

This at least is one interpretation of why governments have given so little attention to and support for the development of nonviolent action. Another interpretation is that the power of the people is not really yet understood in government and military circles, and that once the pragmatic effectiveness of nonviolent action is realized, then government leaders will adopt the alternative as a matter of rational policy-making. In either case, the fact is that nonviolent action has tremendous potential but so far has received virtually no attention or support compared to military and diplomatic approaches.

Our aim is not to argue the case for nonviolent action, which has been done ably by many others. Rather, we begin with the assumption that nonviolent action is a worthwhile option that deserves more study and development. Our special interest is in how communication can be used to promote nonviolent action, especially when little or no action is taking place.

## Overview

In the next three chapters we present, in some detail, case studies of popular nonviolent action against repression or oppression:

- the toppling of Indonesian President Suharto in 1998;
- the thwarting of the attempted coup in the Soviet Union in 1991;
- the blocking of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) in 1998.

We selected these case studies with a number of aims in mind. First, we sought relatively recent events so that we could check our assessments with participants or experts. Second, we wanted a variety of types of action. One was a rapid, urgent action (Soviet coup) while two were escalating campaigns (anti-Suharto; MAI). Two were primarily located at a national level while one was global (MAI). Third, we selected cases that involved communication, including communication technology, in a prominent way.

Fourth, we chose cases that offered a clear contrast with much less visible action at other times or on other issues. To focus attention, we picked out some situations that provide a strong contrast to the actions taken, because they are situations where more or stronger action would have been valuable but few actions of immediate consequence or even high visibility were taken. For example, in Indonesia, the inspired action that led to Suharto's resignation in 1998 can be contrasted with a lack of visible action in 1965–1966 during massacres that claimed at least half a million lives.

Finally, each of the three cases involves an international dimension as well as a local and national one. The Suharto regime was supported by many other governments, opposed by some nongovernment groups and was not an issue for most people outside the country. Communication issues are especially important in this international dimension, since few people outside the country ever have the opportunity to experience events in Indonesia. Even those who visit the country, such as tourists in Bali, may have little inkling of political struggles or how to intervene. There-

fore, the mass media, governments, and groups such as Amnesty International play a crucial role in shaping people's ideas about what is happening and what could be happening.

After these case studies, we are in a good position to deal with a number of questions about nonviolent action and communication. What communication methods are useful for nonviolent action? Which technologies are most helpful? What preparations should be made to aid the struggle? What can be done to foster nonviolent action against repression, aggression, and oppression when there is little awareness of the need for or possibility of action?

Chapters 5 and 6 offer two routes for dealing with these sorts of questions. First is nonviolent action theory. We outline in chapter 5 a variety of perspectives to see what insights they provide into communication against repression, aggression, and oppression. As one would expect, nonviolent action theory is highly useful for understanding the dynamics of nonviolent action, but surprisingly there is little on offer to deal with communication issues. The most useful tool is Johan Galtung's model of the great chain of nonviolence, which can be developed into a communication framework.

In chapter 6 we turn to communication theory, canvassing a range of perspectives ranging from signal transmission theory to semiotics. It turns out that each theory — even when the theory has serious flaws for other purposes — provides some insight into how to better communicate against repression, aggression, and oppression. As we progress through this chapter, we gradually build a model for this purpose.

Finally, in chapter 7 we propose a set of steps for developing communication strategies against repression, aggression, and oppression, illustrating them by examining options for each of the three case studies.

We chose to put case studies first (chapters 2, 3 and 4), followed by theory (chapters 5 and 6), finishing with communication strategies (chapter 7). Another arrangement would have been to put the theory before the case studies and to use models developed in the theory

chapters to analyze the case studies in depth. This approach certainly has merit, but it is a rather different project than the one we undertook. Rather than putting priority on developing theoretical insight into case studies — a worthy task, to be sure — our principal aim is to develop a framework that has some practical use for activists. For this purpose, we found it fruitful to use the case studies to inform the discussion of theory, leading to the discussion of communication strategy in chapter 7. Thus, our ordering of the material reflects our primary purpose, which is to use theory to help promote better action, with the study of action to promote better theory being secondary for us.<sup>24</sup> Those with a special interest in theory can easily proceed straight to chapters 5 and 6. We hope that others will be stimulated to undertake a variety of analyses dealing with communication and nonviolence, a field of vital significance whose surface has only been touched.

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24 A comment from a different field is relevant here: "If we look at social phenomena not from the point of view of contributing to theory, but rather from the point of view of contributing to actions under specific circumstances, very different aspects can be the most important." Bjørn Gustavsen, "Liberation of work and the role of social research," in Tom R. Burns, Lars Erik Karlsson, and Veljko Rus (eds.), *Work and Power: The Liberation of Work and the Control of Political Power* (London: Sage, 1979), pp. 341–356, at p. 347.

## 2

### Nonviolence against Indonesian repression: barriers to action

In 1965 on the Indonesian island of Java where there had been widespread slaughter of alleged communists, peasant women would occasionally line the roads as soldiers in trucks passed by. The women, in a display of contempt and a refusal to co-operate with the activities of these rampaging soldiers, would turn their backs and lift their sarongs to display their backsides to the troops, a gesture that in numerous cases cost them their lives.<sup>1</sup> Thus our first case study, nonviolent resistance in Indonesia from 1965, starts with a reminder of the courageous resistance that challenged the brutal regime of that country.

Yet defeat of repressive regimes generally takes much more than contempt and courage. It requires high levels of organization, preparation, and commitment. Accordingly, it was more than 30 years before Indonesian President Suharto resigned. The years of his rule coincided with continual but varying levels of resistance in Indonesia, which makes it an appropriate case study to demonstrate the waxing and waning of nonviolent struggle and its effectiveness. Despite massive repression and killings undertaken under the Suharto regime, for most of his rule there was not a high level of worldwide outrage at events in Indonesia.

On the contrary, as far as most Western governments were concerned, the situation in Indonesia seemed fairly satisfactory for most of the period from 1965 to 1998. It was only when dissent at the popular level grew sufficiently for governments to feel that they must respond to public opinion that foreign policies turned around.

However, we will start firstly with resistance in Indonesia itself and specifically that short period in 1998 when there was massive and effective resistance, before comparing

those events with two others: the 1965–1966 massacres and the Indonesian invasion and occupation of East Timor from 1975.

#### The toppling of Suharto<sup>2</sup>

Indonesia became a Dutch colony through a long period of expansion beginning in 1619 and ending in the 1920s. After occupation by the Japanese during World War II, nationalist leaders declared independence in 1945 and after a national revolution gained sovereignty in 1949. Over the period 1965–1967, the left-leaning Sukarno government was replaced by a military-dominated regime led by Suharto, accompanied by a major bloodbath, as described later.

The foundation of the Suharto regime's power was the military forces, but with a democratic facade. Within this framework, Suharto maintained power through astute political maneuvering.<sup>3</sup> He sidelined challengers, rewarded friends (especially family members), and repressed dissent. Repression was systematic: all potential opponents, both popular and in the elite, including those in the military, were crushed. All organizations, such as political parties, trade unions, and cultural bodies, that might provide a basis for questioning or challenging the regime were

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2 Useful collections on these events are given in Edward Aspinall, Herb Feith, and Gerry van Klinken (eds.), *The Last Days of President Suharto* (Melbourne: Monash Asia Institute, Monash University, 1999); Geoff Forrester and R. J. May (eds.), *The Fall of Soeharto* (Bathurst, NSW: Crawford House, 1998). See also Marcus Mietzner, "From Soeharto to Habibie: The Indonesian armed forces and political Islam during the transition," in Geoff Forrester (ed.), *Post-Soeharto Indonesia: Renewal or Chaos?* (Bathurst, NSW: Crawford House Publishing, 1999), pp. 65–102.

3 Ed Aspinall, "Opposition and elite conflict in the fall of Soeharto," in Forrester and May, *The Fall of Soeharto*, pp. 130–153, at pp. 131–132.

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This chapter is co-authored by Adrian Vickers.

1 James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 283.

banned, restrained, or disempowered by being brought into the state mechanism, a process called “depoliticization.”

As a method to prevent challenges to the regime, co-optation was a potent supplement to repression. The most effective form of co-optation was through economic growth, which proceeded at an impressive 7% annually from 1970. During this time the regime was supported by Western governments and the major international funding agencies and praised for its economic policies.<sup>4</sup>

After the announcement of a period of “openness” in the late 1980s, voices of dissent began to emerge, but no one inside or outside the country believed that Suharto’s grip on power was weakening. There were still hundreds of thousands of former prisoners from the earlier and more extreme repression who had to carry identity cards and who were restricted in various ways, including being limited in where they could live or work. These people, known as “ex-Tapols,” had to report at least once a month to their district military command headquarters, an exercise that served as a reminder of the power of the military in Indonesia.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, into the mid 1990s, popular opposition was muted, partially as a result of continued economic growth and partly as an outcome of the ongoing repressive culture and disempowerment of most opposition. For instance, the Indonesian government undertook “mental ideological screening” to ensure that anyone who was deemed to have “communist ties” — and this included not only ex-Tapols but also their extended families — was excluded from employment in the military, the civil service, the schools, political parties, the press, legal aid societies, the priesthood, and even shadow puppet troupes.<sup>6</sup>

Opposition political parties were banned or severely constrained, serving only as fig leaves for a pretend democracy. Western governments fettered the regime and its policies. The Indonesian military retained ultimate power and received weapons and training from various governments such as Australia and the US.

This suddenly changed as a result of economic collapse, triggered by the crash in Thailand beginning in 1997 which spread to several South-East Asian economies. Indonesia was particularly hard hit, with the collapse of the currency leading to widespread impoverishment, more extreme than in other countries.<sup>7</sup> Prior to the collapse, Indonesia’s economic policies had been fully supported by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and most commentators, but afterwards blame was placed either on corruption and cronyism or on global markets.

The dramatic change in economic climate opened the door for a deeper expression of popular opposition that had been building. By 1996 at least one economic commentator was doubting that Suharto would be able to suppress the growing democracy movement.<sup>8</sup> Now outrage over corruption, collusion, and cronyism became a rallying cry, with the government blamed for economic misfortunes. The regime was not well structured to deal with this new situation. Suharto had become increasingly out of touch with everyday realities since he was surrounded with sycophants, operated using a 1960s way of thinking (including a Cold-War fear of communism) and was tied into the crony system he had used to build his power. As a result, his political judgment suffered. In addition, his health was poor, so both physically and mentally he was not ready for

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4 Richard J. Barnet and Ronald E. Müller, *Global Reach: The Power of the Multinational Corporations* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1974), p. 79.

5 Aryen Neier, “Watching rights,” *The Nation*, Vol. 251, No. 2, 9 July 1990, p. 43.

6 Neier, “Watching rights.”

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7 Kevin Evans, “Economic update,” in Forrester, *Post-Soeharto Indonesia*, pp. 105–127.

8 Michael Shari, “Suharto may win this battle, but not the war,” *Business Week*, 26 August 1996, p. 45.

the unprecedented challenges he faced in 1998.<sup>9</sup>

The economic crisis had the most severe impact on the urban working class and the unemployed. Some Indonesians were earning as little as 70 cents a day and were drastically affected by the rising cost of food and soaring unemployment. Accordingly there were protests and food riots, to which Suharto responded by banning mass rallies in Jakarta and insisting that anyone caught hoarding essential commodities would be sentenced to death.<sup>10</sup> However, it was not poor Indonesians, mainly preoccupied with pure survival, who organized the major actions. The overt opposition was drawn primarily from the middle classes, including students, academics, university graduates, journalists, lawyers, artists, and staff of nongovernment organizations (NGOs). This middle-class group, having grown up in a time of prosperity, was particularly affected by the sharp changes in lifestyle brought about by the crisis. Of those involved, students were by far the most vocal.

Before 1997, NGO leaders and former student activists had tried to create a coalition in opposition to the regime, but had not got very far: Suharto's methods of depoliticization were too effective.<sup>11</sup> The collapse of the economy served as a catalyst and a rallying point for a more solidified and organized opposition.

Students began to openly challenge the government by holding rallies on campus and then moving off campus in defiance of conditions imposed by the police. As the rallies became larger, more students joined in and leaders became bolder. Meanwhile, opposition activity blossomed in a range of areas, such as the arts scene.

At a student-led protest on 12 May 1998, four students and two others in the crowd were killed by troops at Trisakti University, an elite private institution in Jakarta. This event triggered massive rioting and looting in Jakarta, causing extensive damage and leaving more than a thousand people dead (principally looters caught in fires). There is strong evidence that the riots were orchestrated, probably to discredit the protesters.<sup>12</sup> In any event, the killing of the four students and subsequent events caused a loss of public faith in the regime and led some military elites to think that Suharto should resign in order to placate the population.<sup>13</sup>

As is common in nonviolent struggles, violence by the regime triggered much greater support for the resistance. Massive rallies were held throughout the country. In Jakarta, students continued to lead protests, which involved ever larger sectors of the population. This unprecedented public display of opposition caused splits within the ruling elite.

Not long before these events, Suharto had promoted his son-in-law Subianto Prabowo to head the Kopassus special force. A ruthless operator, Prabowo had ambitions to gain power over the head of the armed forces, General Wiranto, who was also close to Suharto. Earlier in 1998, various activists "disappeared," some of them emerging weeks or months later after imprisonment and torture in secret locations. Others were presumed to have been murdered; their relatives still do not know their fate. Prabowo probably orchestrated this repressive operation. He sought to stop student protests by force and was responsible for the killing of students on 12 May, which may have been done purposely by military units rather than accidentally in general shooting.<sup>14</sup> Since this repressive approach was triggering ever more massive

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9 Geoffrey Forrester, "Introduction," in Forrester and May, *The Fall of Soeharto*, pp. 1–23, at pp. 17–18.

10 "Food riots batter Indonesia," *Maclean's*, Vol. 111, No. 9, 2 March 1998, p. 31.

11 Ikrar Nusa Bhakti, "Trends in Indonesian student movements in 1998," in Forrester and May, *The Fall of Soeharto*, pp. 167–178.

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12 Susan Berfield and Dewi Loveard, "Ten days that shook Indonesia," *Asiaweek*, 24 July 1998, pp. 30–41.

13 Forrester, "Introduction," p. 21.

14 Berfield and Loveard, "Ten days that shook Indonesia."

popular opposition, some members of the elite decided Suharto had to go.<sup>15</sup>

A student occupation of parliament was crucial. This occupation reached its climax on 20 May and was a key factor in convincing members of cabinet that Suharto had to resign. As the protest expanded, opposition political leaders joined in. Amien Rais, a leading Islamic political figure, called a rally for 20 May. In order to stop it, Indonesian troops shut down central Jakarta. This in turn alienated the business sector, supplying yet more pressure for change. The end was near when the leader of the parliament — all of whose members had been virtually handpicked by Suharto — called for Suharto to step down. On 23 May Suharto suddenly announced his resignation and his deputy, B. J. Habibie, took over. The surprise resignation reduced the chance of a broader democratization at that time.

### Nonviolent action against Suharto

The protests of the Indonesian students demonstrated several classical, as well as some novel, forms of nonviolent action. These included martyrdom, visual props, solidarity-building, and ensuring good relations with at least some of the media. Importantly, the students appear to have appealed to the community in ways that gained widespread sympathy rather than suspicion or hostility.

Achieving this sympathy was probably largely due to the diversity of the students involved in the protests, whom Human Rights Watch identified as coming from a “wide variety of Muslim, radical leftist, and reform-oriented organizations.”<sup>16</sup> Importantly, the protests were also geographically broad-based, with the involvement of campuses in Sumatra,

Sulawesi, Kalimantan, Bali, Lombok, Irian Jaya, and Timor as well as thirteen cities in Java.

In many respects, the police, in trying to suppress the dissent,<sup>17</sup> played into the demonstrators’ hands. Certainly the Trisakti University students did not want, nor plan for, four of their group to be killed but, following this incident, they were definitely not going to be silenced. On the contrary, many more joined the protests. The four killed students came to be known as “Martyrs of Reformation”. Rallies in their honor were held all over Indonesia, at which the special song “Fallen Flowers,” reserved for those who die in a holy war, was hummed. These martyrs served as a point of focus and an inspiration for other demonstrators.<sup>18</sup>

The Indonesian events fit a standard pattern of nonviolent action, in which open defiance of the regime generates greater support.<sup>19</sup> If the regime does nothing, then opponents become bolder in their actions. If the regime responds with overt violence, this causes public outrage and greater support for the opposition. Open use of violence by the regime, especially the killing of students at an elite university, turned out to be very counter-productive. In comparison, the “disappearances” earlier in the year caused far less outrage. The main difference was that it was harder to assign responsibility for covert torture and killing. Similarly, the regime attempted to distance itself from responsibility by using agents provocateurs, paid demonstrators, gangs, and criminals to undertake looting, arson, and rape, including attacks on the Chinese minority, designed to aggravate

15 While Suharto was the primary target, there was also a faction fight in the military, which split into Wiranto and Prabowo camps, with the Navy and Air Force distancing themselves from the rest of the armed forces and the police becoming autonomous.

16 Quoted in Suzanne Charlé, “‘Banning is banned’,” *The Nation*, Vol. 267, No. 10, 5 October 1998, pp. 15–19, at p. 18.

17 This assumes it was the police behind the shootings of the four students for, as mentioned, there is evidence that suggests the military were responsible.

18 Charlé, “‘Banning is banned’,” p. 15.

19 See Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973), pp. 447–817, on the dynamics of nonviolent action.

ethnic tensions and reduce the chance of unified opposition to the regime.<sup>20</sup>

One of the standard methods used by the regime to maintain control was to infiltrate potential opposition groups and to foster dissension, such as by accentuating religious and ethnic divisions. Eventually, students attempted to overcome this by instituting tight internal discipline, to the extent of preventing nonstudents from joining occupations, in order to prevent infiltration and to maintain focus on a single goal: to get rid of Suharto.

The tactics used by one key student group, Forum Kota (City Forum) illustrate one method of avoiding co-optation. Every week the group changed both its leader and its command post so that no one leader or campus could gain control and be open to co-optation.<sup>21</sup> Although the military did try, as usual, to infiltrate the student groups, this proved unsuccessful. One student said laughingly of those who attempted to infiltrate, "They always have short hair, and they are in good physical condition. You can spot them a mile away."<sup>22</sup>

Even though the protests caused huge traffic jams, the students enjoyed wide popular support even among those directly affected such as taxi and pedicab drivers. Women passed out roses to pedicab drivers with notes attached: "Don't let your consciences die." Two other vivid protests included students putting flowers down the barrels of soldiers' guns and other students walking around with their mouths taped up, as a symbolic protest against the lack of free speech in Indonesia.<sup>23</sup>

Setting up alternative societies and practicing the sort of life one envisages as the outcome of one's struggles play an important part in the struggle itself, reminding activists

of their goals and serving as an example of what can be achieved. Directly after Suharto's resignation, some students went to work with farmers and factory workers, raising political consciousness and helping to build a civil society. Others were busy training new university students in the tactics and philosophy of dissent.<sup>24</sup> The actions of both groups suggest that the students knew that the struggle would be ongoing and had the foresight needed to prepare for the next stages of the struggle. On the other hand, in the years after Suharto's departure, some student leaders have supported the use of violent methods, in addition to nonviolent ones, as part of their strategy.

Student protests and sit-ins were backed up with teach-ins where tactics could be thrashed out, information shared, uncertainties clarified, and group solidarity strengthened. Both organizationally and strategically, students had learned from demonstrations in both Thailand in the 1970s and South Korea much more recently. Among the chants were those borrowed from overseas struggles, including one from the French New Left in the 1960s: "Il est interdit d'interdire" which translates as "Banning is banned."<sup>25</sup>

This suggests that students had weighed up what had been successful in other struggles and thought about what might be applicable in their own. Therefore, news and other information from protests elsewhere, as well as links with the movements themselves, can be very beneficial. Kurt Schock, writing of differences in the social movement mobilizations in the Philippines and Burma in the 1980s, noted that the Burmese movement may have been disadvantaged by a lack of contact with influential international allies.<sup>26</sup>

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20 Sometimes the regime blamed labor leaders for rioting against ethnic groups. See "Labor round-up," *Multinational Monitor*, Vol. 15, No. 9, September 1994, p. 4.

21 Charlé, "'Banning is banned'," p. 17.

22 Charlé, "'Banning is banned'," p. 18.

23 Charlé, "'Banning is banned'," p. 18.

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24 Charlé, "'Banning is banned'," p. 18.

25 Charlé, "'Banning is banned'," p. 18. We thank Henri Jeanjean for advice on this slogan.

26 Kurt Schock, "People power and political opportunities: social movement mobilization and outcomes in the Philippines and Burma," *Social Problems*, Vol. 46, No. 3, August 1999, pp. 355–375, at p. 365.



Schock also identifies political opportunities, influential allies, and press freedoms or at least information flows as other crucial factors in allowing sufficient mobilization of social groups to challenge a regime or its leaders. In Indonesia, the economic downturn was a catalyst for the already present discontent to escalate, while political opportunities opened up suddenly as the government's and military's actions backfired. The question of information flows needs to be looked at as part of the broader question of communication.

### The role of communication

Communication was crucial in coordinating resistance and alerting people to what was occurring. At the level of the mass media, this was a challenging task since there was a history of Suharto closing down newspapers if they strayed from the official government line. Variations of censorship include "stifling of all viewpoints critical of the regime through closing down alternative publications, restricting access to communication technologies, and centralizing the news media services under the control of the state" as well as "imposition of economic sanctions, the revocation of publishing licenses, and the harassment, imprisonment, torture, or assassination of journalists."<sup>27</sup> Several of these tactics were used by the Indonesian regime to keep the media in check.

For example, in the summer of 1994 the regime closed three weekly magazines, issued official warnings against three other publications, and placed three more "under watch" for such misdemeanors as reporting on human rights demonstrations in East Timor.<sup>28</sup> The government oversaw a licensing system by means of which it could simply withdraw a license and close a newspaper.

As well as censorship, the regime also made a habit of fabricating stories that put its action in a more favorable light. These stories would then be picked up and run by the more compliant sections of the media. Such was the case with the November 1974 stories carried by the Indonesian press of Communist Chinese infiltration into East Timor, which helped to ideologically prepare the way for Indonesian invasion the following year.<sup>29</sup> This was followed by numerous other fabrications about East Timor carried in the Indonesian press over the entire period of the occupation.

As another form of media control, the Suharto regime also sponsored the Union of Indonesian Journalists. However, a number of journalists formed their own independent union, the Alliance of Independent Journalists. When these journalists signed petitions in support of *Tempo*, one of the weeklies closed in 1994 and reputed to have been the country's most popular magazine, the Indonesian government threatened to also close down the publications for which these journalists worked.<sup>30</sup>

Along with *Tempo*, the newsweeklies *Editor* and *De Tik* were closed on the basis of "ignorance of press ethics." Prior to the three closures, there had been two years of what has been termed "relative press freedom" during which time some Indonesian journals had cautiously reported on some events in East Timor. However, throughout 1993 the military and the official Ministry of Information applied increasing pressure on journalists, especially in relation to East Timor. Foreign governments and commercial institutions conspired in the suppression of information. The *Straits Times* of Singapore, for instance, printed an edition sent for sale in Indonesia. Before doing so, it would remove any articles or pictures that may have been offensive to the Indonesian government.<sup>31</sup>

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27 Schock, "People power and political opportunities," p. 370.

28 Murray Seeger, "Press suppression in Indonesia," *Nieman Reports*, Vol. 49, No. 1, Spring 1995, p. 44.

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29 James Dunn, *Timor: A People Betrayed* (Brisbane: Jacaranda, 1983), p. 79.

30 Seeger, "Press suppression in Indonesia."

31 Seeger, "Press suppression in Indonesia."

Despite the regime's best efforts to silence them, however, some Indonesian journalists were in the forefront of the dissent. Ahmad Taufik had been a journalist on *Tempo* and was involved in the formation of the Alliance of Independent Journalists. The group founded its own magazine, though at great cost to its members' personal safety and freedom. They were among numerous journalists jailed for the articles they wrote critical of the regime's policies. Even an 18 year-old office worker at the magazine was arrested and sentenced to 20 months imprisonment.<sup>32</sup>

During the student protests of 1998, the Alliance of Independent Journalists played an important role, running crash courses for the students to better advise them on how to publish newsletters and convey their ideas. Other media and journalists were also sympathetic, including the *Jakarta Post*, whose editor noted that, by covering the protests, his paper could address issues which otherwise were not permitted under the strict rules of the Suharto regime.<sup>33</sup>

Electronic mail and the World Wide Web were effective tools for the opposition, since they by-passed censorship of the mass media and were low cost. Although relatively few Indonesians then had access to the Internet, it proved most useful for those who did. This once again confirmed Schock's point that links with the outside world can be useful and international news coverage can be influential in domestic affairs, a point underscored by students at the demonstrations carrying placards stating "Wear your lipstick. You might be on CNN tonight." A number of banners were in English, the students knowing that this was crucial to informing people in other countries of the situation in their own.

Throughout the events, foreign governments played little overt role and certainly did little to help the opposition. Public events were reported to the world but the outcome was

mainly determined by internal dynamics, especially in Jakarta. However, reports of actions on the web and CNN helped the students to maintain their momentum.

We have seen, then, that in 1998 there was mass action that led to Suharto's resignation, but what about 1988 or 1978, indeed any of the previous 30 years during which repression was a way of life? In reality, there was substantial resistance to repression throughout this time: it is wrong to imagine that there was no dissent or action.<sup>34</sup> However, our focus now turns away from those courageous individuals and groups that did resist, resting instead on occasions and situations where there was considerably less action, for example compared to 1998. Of course, to target situations where there is relatively little action opens an enormous range of material for examination. In order to draw clearer insights, it is useful to consider events where repression was especially brutal or extensive and where it was widely known. Hence we turn now to the 1965–1966 massacres in Indonesia and what lessons they can reveal about why at least some things that "could have been done" did not occur.

### The 1965–1966 massacres<sup>35</sup>

President Sukarno, leader of the government that came to power following Indonesian independence in 1949, rose to prominence on an anti-colonial platform. He sponsored the development of an alternative "Third World" through the 1955 Bandung conference and was quick to invoke anti-foreign feeling when

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34 Max Lane, "Voices of dissent in Indonesia," *Arena*, No. 61, 1982, pp. 110–128.

35 Robert Cribb (ed.), *The Indoensian Killings 1965–1966* (Melbourne: Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1990). For concise summaries, see Malcolm Caldwell (ed.), *Ten Years' Military Terror in Indonesia* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1975), pp. 13–17; Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *The Political Economy of Human Rights, Volume 1: The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1979), pp. 205–217.

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32 John Pilger, "The secret history of Suharto's bloody rise," *New Statesman & Society*, Vol. 8, 22 September 1995, pp. 14–15.

33 Charlé, "'Banning is banned'," p. 15.

faced with what he perceived to be continuing colonialist tendencies of large Western states. He showed himself willing to court the Soviet and Chinese governments if it suited him to do business with them rather than the West. The US government<sup>36</sup> felt that the Sukarno government could not be relied upon in a region it considered to be of utmost strategic importance and was desperate for a more staunchly anti-communist regime to rule in the archipelago.<sup>37</sup>

The opportunity for change came in 1965 following an attempted coup.<sup>38</sup> The incident deeply tarnished Sukarno's reputation and heralded a power shift towards the military. Along with his military supporters, General Suharto, the Commander of the Jakarta

garrison that defeated the coup, took the opportunity to massacre those who were known, thought, or rumored to be members of the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) or their sympathizers and many more as well. Using a well-orchestrated media campaign, Suharto banned the PKI and escalated his program of slaughtering communists and suspects. The army systematically went about the obliteration of those deemed politically undesirable in Central Java, moving east through to Bali. As well as killing suspected communists themselves, army officers gave lists of names to right-wing Muslim groups and other anti-communist militias who were provided with arms, transport, and training for the purposes of carrying out this pogrom. The CIA was firmly behind Suharto's actions, supplying lists of leading communists to the Indonesian army and recording their deaths.<sup>39</sup> Although most of the deaths occurred in 1965 and 1966, the slaughter continued until 1969 when virtually all apparent opposition had been eliminated.

Against this wave of killings, left-wing opponents were quickly rendered few and disorganized. Power shifted further to Suharto in March 1966 when the army insisted that Sukarno delegate extensive powers to Suharto, at the time Chief of Staff of the Army, and then officially in 1968 when Suharto was appointed to the presidency in his own right. By then he had set up the conditions for comfortable rule with the bulk of his opponents killed or imprisoned. It is commonly estimated that 500,000 to one million died in the anti-communist rampages, making this one

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36 We try to avoid constructions in which a country is identified with its government, e.g. "The US had never been pleased." This form of metonymy is especially inappropriate when discussing nonviolent action, which often pits citizens against their government or its agents. Even our own constructions are shorthands for more accurate but complex formulations, such as "US government" really meaning something like "US dominant foreign policy elites."

37 In accordance with its assumed right to interfere in the affairs of other countries and its history of doing so, the US government undertook serious covert intervention in Indonesia in 1956–1958, in order to undermine Sukarno. This particularly took the form of US government agencies' heavy support for rebels but this interference backfired in its immediate aims. For a fuller story, see Audrey R. Kahin and George McT. Kahin, *Subversion as Foreign Policy: The Secret Eisenhower and Dulles Debacle in Indonesia* (New York: New Press, 1995).

38 Responsibility for the coup has been much debated. Suharto and his allies consistently attributed it to the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) in order to justify their pogrom. Given that the PKI was totally unprepared for action, many analysts believe the coup was an internal military matter. Yet others think that Suharto knew about the plans and used the coup to get rid of rivals. See for example Humphrey McQueen, "How Suharto won power," *Independent Monthly*, September 1990, pp. 24–29.

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39 Kathy Kadane, "Ex-agents say CIA compiled death lists for Indonesians," *San Francisco Examiner*, 20 May 1990, pp. 1, 22; <http://users.wesnet.net/~cgian/suha-cia.htm>. For a discussion of the significance of the CIA role, see Robert Cribb, "Problems in the historiography of the killings in Indonesia," in Cribb, *The Indonesian Killings 1965–1966*, pp. 1–43, at p. 7. On the role of the CIA and US policy makers in Suharto's rise to power, see Peter Dale Scott, "Exporting military-economic development: America and the overthrow of Sukarno, 1965–67," in Caldwell, *Ten Years' Military Terror in Indonesia*, pp. 209–263.

of the century's major bloodbaths.<sup>40</sup> At least 400,000 were imprisoned, many on the remote island of Buru.

Those Indonesians who openly opposed the massacres did so at enormous cost. Many chose not to act because the risks were too great: even the slightest resistance was dangerous and could mean the death of oneself or one's family. Indeed, it is believed that many PKI members went meekly to their deaths, sometimes even to the extent of lining up in their funeral clothes to be executed.<sup>41</sup> Overt resistance would have required not only extraordinary courage but, to be effective, high and efficient levels of organization would have had to be developed for the new circumstances which prevailed. This would have been a daunting challenge, given the number of activists being killed. However, examples of individual bravery exist. For example, the then head of Denpasar Hospital, Dr Djelantik, at great personal risk refused killing squads access to his patients.<sup>42</sup>

As hundreds or thousands were killed every day, Western governments had good information about what was happening. Documents from the period show that Australian and US governments knew about the massacres as they were occurring, yet did nothing to stop them,

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40 Barbara Harff and Ted Robert Gurr, "Victims of the state: genocides, politicides and group repression from 1945 to 1995," in Albert J. Jongman (ed), *Contemporary Genocides: Causes, Cases, Consequences* (Leiden: Projecten Interdisciplinair Onderzoek naar de Oorzaken van Mensenrechtenschendingen, 1996), pp. 33–58. For a discussion of different estimates of the number killed, see Cribb, "Problems in the historiography of the killings in Indonesia," pp. 7–14.

41 Cribb, "Problems in the historiography of the killings in Indonesia," p. 20.

42 A. A. M. Djelantik, *The Birthmark: Memoirs of a Balinese Prince* (Singapore: Peripuls, 1997), pp. 299–303. For an account of the systematic torture and imprisonment of suspected communists, and of underground attempts to reorganize, see Carmel Budiardjo, *Surviving Indonesia's Gulag: A Western Woman Tells Her Story* (London: Cassell, 1996).

instead welcoming the elimination of the communist threat.<sup>43</sup> Australian Prime Minister Harold Holt was obviously pleased with the situation in Indonesia when he announced in 1966 that "with 500,000 to 1,000,000 Communist sympathizers knocked off, I think it is safe to assume a reorientation has taken place."<sup>44</sup>

There was no groundswell of international public opinion that might have forced governments to adopt a different approach. Perhaps the strongest barrier to more widespread mobilization was the Cold War paradigm within which many people understood the global order. The beneficiaries of this ideology were arms manufacturers and those who sought to invest in repressive regimes such as Indonesia which, if nothing else, seemed politically stable as well as obviously friendly to foreign investment.

However, many people in these Western countries did not perceive the situation in this economic light, nor did they understand the relevance of these economic arrangements. Many simply perceived the world situation as one of danger with the overwhelming need being to hold communism at bay. There was widespread paranoia about the march of communism, widely supported by government propaganda that took advantage of much of the pain and loss from the previous world war.

Belief in the so-called domino effect promoted fear that the southward march of communism was almost inevitable except by means of the utmost vigilance, enormous expenditure on arms, and inclusion within a nuclear umbrella. With communism having established itself in Eastern Europe and having "spread" from the Soviet Union to China and Korea, it was a common belief that Indonesia and then Australia (probably by invasion) were

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43 Marian Wilkinson, "Hidden holocaust," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 July 1999, pp. 1s, 4s–5s; David Jenkins, "The silent watchers," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 July 1999, p. 11.

44 *New York Times*, 6 July 1966, quoted in Chomsky and Herman, *The Political Economy of Human Rights*, p. 217

next in line. Crude though this was, it held much sway in a fiercely paranoid and anti-communist climate, used by Western governments to control domestic situations as well as to guide foreign policy. During the 1960s and 1970s, the most visible manifestation of the anti-communist impulse was the war in Vietnam.

The mass media's commitment to anti-communism meant that the government line went largely unchallenged. For their part, opposition political parties usually spent more time supporting the ideology and trying to distance themselves as much as possible from any socialist taint than trying to challenge Cold War assumptions. These barriers proved too large, in the case of the 1965–1966 massacres, to have sufficient pressures mounted on governments to take strong stands against the Indonesian government's brutality and repression.

Thus, the massacres proceeded without much resulting backlash. Within Indonesia, this can be explained in part by the lack of preparation for resistance and lack of an organized movement to build on outrage caused by the killings.<sup>45</sup> Outside Indonesia, the massacres received relatively little attention, with anti-communism providing a framework for justifying what was happening. This has been called a case of "constructive terror," namely mass killing that fostered a favorable investment climate.<sup>46</sup>

## East Timor

East Timor<sup>47</sup> became a Portuguese colony in the 1500s. Prior to that it had been a series of

small kingdoms. East Timor remained Portuguese until 1975, shortly after the Caetano regime in Lisbon was overthrown by a coup, bringing about a policy change towards decolonization. In response several political parties formed in East Timor with views about what sort of future the territory should have. Fretilin was the party that went on to gather most popular support and that was paramount in the struggle for independence.

Following the Lisbon coup, the Portuguese stayed in East Timor until one of the East Timorese parties, the Timorese Democratic Union, staged a small and unsuccessful coup that was fairly easily put down. At that stage the Portuguese retreated to the island of Atauro, thus leaving a temporary vacuum, of which the Indonesian government was keen to take advantage despite Fretilin declaring independence for the Democratic Republic of East Timor in November 1975. Both the Indonesian and Australian governments promoted the view that Fretilin was Marxist.

Indonesian forces invaded in December. As well as military operations, they engaged in massive killing of civilians, rape, torture, and destruction. Fretilin was the target of much of the slaughter, although the group held its own initially, having its major strongholds in the mountains and being in possession of a substantial number of arms that the Portuguese had left behind. However, the Indonesian

45 Various factors are discussed by Cribb, "Problems in the historiography of the killings in Indonesia."

46 Chomsky and Herman, *The Political Economy of Human Rights*, p. 205.

47 Sources include Carmel Budiardjo and Liem Soei Liong, *The War Against East Timor* (London: Zed Books, 1984); Peter Carey and G. Carter Bentley (eds.), *East Timor at the Crossroads: The Forging of a Nation* (London: Cassell, 1995);

Dunn, *Timor: A People Betrayed*; Jill Jolliffe, *East Timor: Nationalism and Colonialism* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1978); Arnold Kohen, *From the Place of the Dead: The Epic Struggles of Bishop Belo of East Timor* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); Arnold Kohen and John Taylor, *An Act of Genocide: Indonesia's Invasion of East Timor* (London: TAPOL, 1979); John Pilger, *Distant Voices* (London: Vintage, 1994), pp. 231–323; Constâncio Pinto and Matthew Jardine, *East Timor's Unfinished Struggle: Inside the Timorese Resistance* (Boston: South End Press, 1997); John G. Taylor, *Indonesia's Forgotten War: The Hidden History of East Timor* (London: Zed Books, 1991); Rodney Tiffen, *Diplomatic Deceits: Government, Media and East Timor* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2001).

military slaughter of East Timorese people was so great that it decimated Fretilin forces as part of its overall culling. Fretilin later made a resurgence in small and then greater numbers.<sup>48</sup>

The Indonesian military assault against East Timor left the small territory devastated. Some estimates claim that up to one-third of the population died. Agricultural output fell by almost 70 percent in just three years, causing serious famine. Infant mortality was elevated to among the highest in the world, nearly all East Timorese teachers were executed, and 400 schools destroyed.<sup>49</sup>

The Indonesian invasion was largely undertaken with the condonation of Western governments, if not their blessing.<sup>50</sup> The Australian and US governments provided quiet succor, hinting only that they did not wish to be seen as openly supporting or condoning any such invasion. Suharto obliged by forestalling a full-scale invasion until President Gerald Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had completed a visit they were making to Jakarta.<sup>51</sup>

In Australia, both Liberal and Labor governments adopted the same policies toward Indonesia. Liberal Prime Minister John Gorton visited Indonesia during his term (1968–1971)

and Liberal Prime Minister William McMahon (1971–1972) received Suharto as his guest in Australia in 1972. In 1968, immediately after becoming leader of the Australian Labor Party (then in opposition), Gough Whitlam advocated a friendly and supportive approach to the Suharto regime which he suggested was preferable to a communist government which he felt had nearly been in command there.<sup>52</sup> Richard Walsh and George Munster claim that Whitlam had an image of Indonesia that had little to do with reality but more to do with his desire for good relations. Whitlam wanted to be sophisticated and cultured, and he was contemptuous of the White Australia Policy which had tarnished Australia's reputation in Asia. Hence he was keen for a new and close relationship with the neighbor to the north but this meant believing the regime to be more innocuous than it was.<sup>53</sup>

As Australian Prime Minister (1972–1975), Whitlam visited Indonesia in 1974 and reportedly told Suharto that an independent Timor would be an unviable state and a potential threat to the area. This was tantamount to giving Suharto a green light for invasion and simultaneously a virtual guarantee that the Australian government would acquiesce in the event of such an invasion.<sup>54</sup>

Such appeasement seems puzzling in some respects but can partially be explained — though certainly not justified — by a somewhat problematic history in the relationship between Australia and Asia generally. The relationship had been dogged by a White Australia Policy which was founded largely on xenophobia and a fear that the Australian (assumed essentially British) way of life was

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48 Budiardjo and Liong, *The War Against East Timor*; Paulino Gama, "The war in the hills, 1975–85: a Fretilin commander remembers," in Carey and Bentley, *East Timor at the Crossroads*, pp. 97–105; Kohen and Taylor, *An Act of Genocide*; Pinto and Jardine, *East Timor's Unfinished Struggle*. There is a theory that the Indonesian military "allowed" Fretilin to survive in the hills in order to blood new soldiers in counter-insurgency. Some 10,000 to 20,000 Indonesian troops died in East Timor between 1975 and 1998.

49 Ed Ayres, "The costs and benefits of war," *World Watch*, Vol. 8, No. 1, January-February 1995, p. 9.

50 Chomsky and Herman, *The Political Economy of Human Rights*, pp. 129–204; Kohen and Taylor, *An Act of Genocide*; Pilger, *Distant Voices*.

51 Budiardjo and Liong, *The War Against East Timor*, p. 9.

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52 Gough Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government, 1972–1975* (Melbourne: Penguin, 1985), pp. 102–119.

53 Richard Walsh and George Munster, *Secrets of State* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1982), pp. 54–55.

54 David Lee and Christopher Waters (eds.), *Evatt to Evans: The Labor Tradition in Australian Foreign Policy* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1997), p. 228.

threatened by the “yellow masses” to the north. Whitlam, on taking office, was keen to overcome the longstanding image of Australia as a nation that eyed its Asian neighbors suspiciously and he felt particularly strongly about the cool relations that had existed between the Indonesian president and his more recent prime ministerial predecessors. In 1967, five years before taking office, he claimed “In Indonesia we lost our first opportunity to preserve and build the legacy of goodwill left by the policies of the Chifley Government and the actions of Dr Evatt.”<sup>55</sup> But Indonesia, post-1965, was a very different country from that encountered by Chifley and Evatt in its early days of independence. Although Whitlam had ample intelligence resources signaling the Indonesia regime’s intentions regarding East Timor, Whitlam had long wanted to rekindle good relations with the Indonesian government, even at the cost of other Asian neighbours.<sup>56</sup>

The slaughter of guerrillas and civilians alike in East Timor was largely undertaken with arms from Western countries. The US government supplied A4-Skyhawks, used to terrorize people in the mountains, as well as OV10 Bronco planes; Lockheed C-130 transport aircraft; Cadillac Cage V-150 Commando armored cars equipped with machine guns, mortar, cannons, and smoke and tear-gas launchers; M-17 rifles; pistols; mortars; machine guns; recoilless rifles; and

extensive communication equipment, as well as providing counter-insurgency training. The Bronco planes in particular are credited with having stepped up the war to new offensive levels.<sup>57</sup> The US government concealed its armaments role from Congress and the US public, with equipment misleadingly justified as being for “training purposes only.”<sup>58</sup>

Journalist John Pilger repeatedly tried to expose the hypocrisy and complicity of Western governments, especially the British and Australian governments.<sup>59</sup> Pilger reported the \$1 billion sale of British Hawk aircraft to Indonesia.<sup>60</sup> According to the Center for Defense Information in Washington, the Hawks were “ideal counter-insurgency aircraft, designed to be used against guerrillas who come from among civilian populations and have no adequate means of response against air attack.”<sup>61</sup> British arms exports provided the Indonesian navy with a warship, the Green Rover, shortly after global media coverage of a 1991 massacre in Dili, East Timor’s capital, discussed below. Western governments could no longer credibly deny Indonesian repression but they sent arms anyway.

The US and British governments were not alone in supplying the technology of repression to the Indonesian military. The Netherlands government supplied three Corvette warships despite the demands of Dutch action groups that the deal be cancelled. Meanwhile, the Australian government donated Nomad Searchmaster planes, fitted with ground and

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55 Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government*, p. 102. Ben Chifley was prime minister immediately after World War II and H. V. Evatt was a prominent diplomat and leader of the Australian Labor Party.

56 Tiffen, *Diplomatic Deceits*, gives an excellent account of the way the key figures in the Australian government, with full knowledge of what was happening in Indonesia and East Timor (including through spy operations), gave some public lip service to human rights while in practice seeking to placate Indonesian elites. For original documents, see Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Wendy Way, ed.), *Australia and the Indonesian Incorporation of Portuguese Timor, 1974–1976* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2000).

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57 Budiardjo and Liong, *The War Against East Timor*, p. 27.

58 Pilger, “The secret history of Suharto’s bloody rise.”

59 Pilger, *Distant Voices*, pp. 301–311.

60 John Pilger, “Land of the dead: journey to East Timor,” *The Nation*, Vol. 258, No. 16, 25 April 1994, pp. 550–552.

61 John Pilger, “Inside the ministry of propaganda,” *New Statesman & Society*, Vol. 7, 29 April 1994, pp. 16–18.

sea surveillance radar.<sup>62</sup> The Australian military, like the British and US, also provided training.

East Timor solidarity campaigns were started around the world. Activists struggled long and hard to stop the bloodshed and pursued various campaigns such as against Western arms sales to Indonesia. Activists used symbolic actions in an attempt to alert other citizens to the situation in East Timor and to take a stand against Western governments' military involvement.<sup>63</sup> In an attempt to "disturb consciences," one British activist conducted a peaceful raid on British Aerospace where he hung a banner, painted slogans, and hammered the machines of destruction. Conducting his own defense at his resulting trial, he focused on Britain's supply of this weaponry to Indonesia and its role in the repression of East Timorese.<sup>64</sup> Some time later four women undertook a similar raid on a British Aerospace plant, attacking with household hammers a Hawk fighter aircraft destined for Indonesia the following day and leaving in the pilot's seat a videotaped explanation for their actions.<sup>65</sup>

Other activists attempted to use the Internet to expose the lies of the Indonesian regime and the real situation in East Timor. In September 1998, Portuguese hackers modified numerous Indonesian websites, adding links to sites elsewhere containing information on human rights abuses in East Timor. They also added

"Free East Timor," in large black letters, to the sites.<sup>66</sup>

In Australia the Campaign for an Independent East Timor (CIET) was established in November 1974.<sup>67</sup> Campaign activists in CIET issued press releases warning of the threat of invasion, contacted members of parliament, met with Fretilin activists, sought trade union actions, organized demonstrations, gathered information, put out fortnightly bulletins, fed information to the media, arranged interviews between Australian media and Fretilin spokespeople, and encouraged formation of East Timor solidarity groups in other countries. Perhaps one of the group's biggest contributions was helping set up secret radio contact in Darwin with Fretilin in nearby East Timor and providing operators and technical support. Several times Australian security police tracked down and seized the transmitter.<sup>68</sup> Australian authorities ordered an end to distribution of messages from East Timor that had been routed through an Australian telecommunication center.<sup>69</sup>

According to Denis Freney of CIET, "... despite the best efforts of many people around the country [Australia] to get the government to stop supporting Suharto we had little success, although we were able to keep the question alive even while most people thought it a 'lost cause'."<sup>70</sup>

Certainly more pressure, more actions, and more demands brought to bear much earlier might have undermined some of the support offered by Western governments to the Suharto regime. The Indonesian government hired a public relations firm, Burson Marsteller, to put forward a more acceptable

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62 Budiardjo and Liong, *The War Against East Timor*, p. 30.

63 For a personal testimony of religiously based resistance, see Ciaron O'Reilly, *Remembering Forgetting: A Journey of Nonviolent Resistance to the War on East Timor* (Brisbane: Swords into Ploughshares, 2000).

64 Vanessa Baird, "Bringing the blood back to British Aerospace," *New Internationalist*, March 1994, p. 21.

65 John Pilger, "In a Liverpool court next week, four women who disarmed a warplane headed for Indonesia will raise the issue of our right to stop genocide," *New Statesman & Society*, Vol. 9, 19 July 1996, p. 23.

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66 Amy Harmon, "'Hactivists' of all persuasions take their struggle to the web," *New York Times*, 31 October 1998.

67 Denis Freney, *A Map of Days: Life on the Left* (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1991), p. 348.

68 Freney, *A Map of Days*, pp. 357–373.

69 Taylor, *Indonesia's Forgotten War*, p. 77.

70 Freney, *A Map of Days*, p. 363.



image of Indonesia's presence in East Timor,<sup>71</sup> suggesting that the regime feared that, as more people in the West learned of events in East Timor, they would pressure their governments to take action. This \$5 million contract is a testament that there was a war of image to be won, as well as a war against the people of East Timor.

In the 1980s, the East Timorese resistance reorganized to gain more support, with the aim of building unity in East Timor and gaining support in Indonesia and internationally. The new emphasis was on nonviolent action, urban participation, and orientation of guerrillas to defending against attacks and not initiating violence. This resulted in a much more potent resistance movement.<sup>72</sup>

A crucial obstacle to generating international support was lack of information about massacres for outside audiences. The Indonesian occupiers did everything possible to shut down communication outside the country. The importance of communication to outside audiences can be illustrated by a couple of examples. In 1989, the Indonesian government "opened" East Timor to outside contact: journalists, among others, were allowed to visit. On 12 November 1991, a slaughter of more than 200 peaceful protesters at the Santa Cruz cemetery in Dili, the capital of East Timor,<sup>73</sup> was witnessed by several Western journalists and recorded on videotape by Max Stahl from Yorkshire TV, who was able to smuggle the tape out of the country. When the journalists' eyewitness accounts and especially the video footage reached an international audience, they caused outrage and triggered a great increase in Western popular support for the East Timorese struggle.<sup>74</sup>

71 Pilger, "Inside the ministry of propaganda."

72 Chisako M. Fukuda, "Peace through nonviolent action: the East Timorese resistance movement's strategy for engagement," *Pacifica Review*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2000, pp. 16–31.

73 Pinto and Jardine, *East Timor's Unfinished Struggle*, pp. 188–199.

74 Kohen, *From the Place of the Dead*, pp. 160–187; Andrew McMillan, *Death in Dili* (Sydney:

Eventually public sentiment abroad turned against the Indonesian regime, largely as a result of getting more information about events in East Timor than governments were willing to disseminate through formal channels. Following the UN-supervised vote in East Timor in September 1999, in which nearly 80% of voters supported independence, the Indonesian military in East Timor connived with anti-independence militias<sup>75</sup> in a ruthless orgy of destruction, killing, and forced relocation.<sup>76</sup> Because there had been considerable attention on the referendum in a country which had been struggling for its independence for a long time, substantial media resources had been stationed in East Timor and there was considerable focus on events there. Such attention was itself an outcome of

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Hodder and Stoughton, 1992); Pilger, *Distant Voices*, p. 236; Tiffen, *Diplomatic Deceits*, pp. 43–53. McMillan also describes the voyage of the peace ship that sailed from Darwin for Dili in early 1992. Later, copies of Stahl's videotape were smuggled into Indonesia and had quite an impact in antigovernment circles.

75 Hamish McDonald, "Masters of terror," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28–29 April 2001, pp. 23–25; Lindsay Murdoch, "UN lays blame for Timor wave of terror," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 April 2001, pp. 1, 14; Lindsay Murdoch, "Old friend of Timor says what others will not," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 April 2001, p. 14. One reason that states may tolerate, encourage, or set up death squads is so that the government's direct involvement can be publicly denied. This is definitely of significance in mobilizing resistance to repression. See Bruce B. Campbell, "Death squads: definition, problems, and historical context," in Bruce B. Campbell and Arthur D. Brenner (eds.), *Death Squads in Global Perspective: Murder with Deniability* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), pp. 1–26, at pp. 12–13. See also, in the same volume, Robert Cribb, "From *petrus* to *ninja*: death squads in Indonesia," pp. 181–202.

76 For a summary of political events in East Timor in 1999, see Bob Lowry, "East Timor: an overview of political developments," in Chris Manning and Peter van Diermen (eds.), *Indonesia in Transition: Social Aspects of Reformasi and Crisis* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2000), pp. 91–108.

the nonviolent struggle to draw the world's eyes to the situation in East Timor. The upshot was that the post-election massacre occurred in the full spotlight of the world media (at least for those countries where East Timor is considered significant, such as Australia). Large numbers of people outside Indonesia were horrified and outraged, leading to many forms of nonviolent action including trade union bans and discouragement of tourism.

Note that in both the 1991 Dili massacre and the 1999 post-vote violence, the East Timorese resistance had by that stage adopted a largely nonviolent approach. Indonesian repression was exercised against nonviolent civilians and information was available to an international audience. Thus, conditions were more conducive to generating international support than in the decade from 1975. Of course, other factors played a role, including the saliency of anti-communism, the strength of international human rights and solidarity groups, and the interest of the mass media. That increased interest on the mass media's part was itself a tribute to the work done by solidarity groups which had made the East Timor issue of interest to international audiences, to which media responded with increased coverage. Overall the reasons that there was more interest and fewer barriers in the 1990s are a complicated blend of outcomes of tactics, a growing awareness of some international issues — which always vie against others for coverage — and a differently configured notion in the “public mind” of international rights and responsibilities.

What is far less studied, and far less easy to understand, is the relative lack of concern and action when information about repression is readily available, though not necessarily presented as the sort of headlines that are influential in determining what many people consider important. While nonviolence research has concentrated on nonviolent action and how it does or doesn't generate support, there has been a neglect of situations, such as East Timor after 1975, that warrant nonviolent action but where relatively little or none occurs. Such cases provide a rich ground for

understanding barriers to action and how they might be overcome.

### **What else could have been done?**

It is relatively easy, after the fact, to speculate about what opponents of Indonesian repression could have done differently in the period 1965–1998 that is the focus of our attention. Since participants in any struggle are constrained by the circumstances in which they operate — including resources, ideas, dangers, and contingencies — it is unfair to blame them for acting as they do and unrealistic to demand a different course of action. Similarly, it would be unfair to expect action from those whose lives, freedom, or families may be at risk, even though some people do act under those circumstances. Nevertheless, it can be productive to talk about “what ifs” in order to learn lessons about nonviolent action that can be applied in future situations. Another way of framing the question is to ask: what barriers to action existed and what eventually breached these barriers?

Within Indonesia, opponents of government repression did in fact use a wide variety of nonviolent techniques, including leaflets, speeches, strikes, rallies, marches, occupations, and vigils. Similarly the people of East Timor used many methods of nonviolent action, though in this case there was guerrilla warfare as well. While vitally important, analyzing domestic nonviolent opposition, both what was done and what could have been done, is a type of study well traversed in the literature on nonviolent action. Therefore we look instead at what has been less commonly examined, namely support for the struggle from outside the country, in this case from outside Indonesia.

As noted previously, there was little help for the Indonesian democratic opposition movement from outside the country. In contrast, the call for independence for East Timor generated international popular support from the start, growing eventually to proportions that governments could not ignore. Invasion of the small territory was poorly received throughout most of South-East Asia, even at a

government level, and there was even less support from African and Latin American governments.<sup>77</sup> It was mainly the US, Australian, and Japanese governments that tried to play down the invasion or to at least put it in the best light possible. In fact, their support proved crucial and, as a result, the Indonesian regime received significant support from foreign governments.

This occurred in three main ways. First, governments around the world legally recognized and maintained the usual diplomatic relations with the Indonesian government. James Dunn, a former Australian consul in East Timor, claims that the Indonesian government calculated — correctly, as it turned out — that, if the Australian and US governments could accommodate East Timor's annexation, then the international community at large would not challenge it.<sup>78</sup> Formal recognition in the international arena is an important source of legitimacy for any government; withdrawing recognition is seen as a sign of serious hostility. Some governments went further and formed closer ties with the Indonesian government. The Australian government later made military agreements with the Indonesian government, including joint training exercises and providing military aid. Furthermore, the Australian government, unlike most others, recognized Indonesian annexation of East Timor, thereby giving greater legitimacy to repressive actions there.

Secondly, the reverse side of this support for the regime has been that foreign governments failed to support democratic opposition movements within Indonesia, whether rhetorically or more substantively. During the cold war, Western governments often gave at least rhetorical support to dissidents and opposition groups in communist countries, but this sort of open advocacy for "freedom and democracy" was mostly lacking in the case of Indonesia under Suharto.

A third form of foreign support for the Indonesian government came through business investment and financial links. Although business activities in a country do not necessarily imply any formal endorsement of the government, they implicitly condone its policies. Withdrawal or avoidance of investment can be a tactic to signal opposition to domestic policies, as in the case of disinvestment in the South African economy under apartheid.

Also worth noting is the role of foreign intellectuals, such as US academics who built links with and supported antisocialist Indonesian figures during Sukarno's presidency, a process funded by the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations and carried out through leading universities such as Cornell, MIT, and Berkeley. Western economists helped teach "modernization theory" to Indonesian economic planners.<sup>79</sup>

The three main forms of support for the Indonesian regime were combined in the Timor Gap Treaty, which divided up resources in the oceans near Timor between Australia and Indonesia. The treaty provided additional acknowledgment of Indonesian sovereignty over East Timor, laid the foundation for increased economic investment, and denied any role for the Indonesian people (not to mention the people of East Timor).

Defenders of government policy would argue that diplomatic recognition and business investment are means to provide a dialogue with the Indonesian government and that good

77 Taylor, *Indonesia's Forgotten War*, p. 76.

78 James Dunn, "The darkest page," *New Internationalist*, March 1994, pp. 24–25.

79 David Ransom, "The Berkeley mafia and the Indonesian massacre," *Ramparts*, No. 9, October 1970, pp. 27–29, 40–49. It would be a worthwhile exercise to investigate more deeply the links between western intellectuals and Indonesian repression. A relevant study in another context is Jonathan Feldman, *Universities in the Business of Repression: The Academic-Military-Industrial Complex and Central America* (Boston: South End Press, 1989). On experts as servants of power, see David Elliott and Ruth Elliott, *The Control of Technology* (London: Wykeham, 1976) and Edward T. Silva and Sheila A. Slaughter, *Serving Power: The Making of the Academic Social Science Expert* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1984).

relations offer greater opportunities for positive influence. Against this, it can be argued that this approach had little obvious success over more than thirty years of Indonesian repression. Indeed, far from trying to influence the Indonesian government to promote human rights and democratic values, Australian governments after 1965 mostly fell over themselves to appease and ingratiate themselves with the Suharto regime.

However, our focus here is not on official rhetoric and short-sighted diplomatic “pragmatism”<sup>80</sup> but on a strategy against repression based on nonviolent action. Diplomatic recognition, military training, and business investment, whatever their effectiveness as means of reducing repression, are not the subject of nonviolence theory,<sup>81</sup> except as barriers to mobilization of nonviolent action. Although governments supported the Indonesian regime under Suharto, it was quite possible for citizens to oppose it and to support the democratic opposition. “Citizens” here is a shorthand for individuals and groups including churches, trade unions, political parties, solidarity groups, human rights organizations, and many others — what can be called “organized civil society.”

We have already described many of the actions of campaigners for independence for East Timor, from hitting out at weaponry bound for Indonesia to hacking Indonesian government websites. Among other actions was a refusal by Melbourne dockworkers to handle Indonesian shipping following the 1991

Dili massacre.<sup>82</sup> This was in vivid contrast to the Australian government, which welcomed, in a visit to Canberra, the Indonesian general who directed the massacre.<sup>83</sup> There was a “boycott Bali” campaign after the Dili massacre, although it didn’t receive much attention. There were also actions such as writing, publishing, and distributing letters, petitions, and articles, providing symbolic support for the Indonesian democratic opposition, and sponsoring of trips abroad by Indonesian and East Timorese activists. Ahmad Taufic, a journalist from the banned Indonesian weekly *Tempo*, who had himself been imprisoned for several years, was one activist who visited the UK to highlight the situation in Indonesia.<sup>84</sup>

Any one of these actions which were taken, along with others that may not have been, could be developed in detail. For example, setting up effective communication systems could involve obtaining simple and cheap short-wave radios and miniature video recorders and getting them to opponents of the regime. Given that Indonesian government officials have systematically lied about their actions, providing first-hand information about events can be quite a powerful challenge, as in the case of the Dili massacre.

## Conclusion

The protests in Indonesia in 1998 that led to the resignation of President Suharto fit the standard pattern of nonviolent action, in which conspicuous protests encourage more people to participate and open repression against protesters causes a backlash against the regime. Studying these events — plus the 1999 protests in Australia and elsewhere over massacres in East Timor following the vote for

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80 Tiffen, *Diplomatic Deceits*, makes a powerful case that the Australian government’s self-styled pragmatism over East Timor was not pragmatic in practice, in part because the government ignored the role of the news media in exposing Indonesian repression and Australian government hypocrisy.

81 Business investment in principle could be a form of nonviolent action, if implemented in support of a nonviolent struggle, but this has certainly not been the way it has been used in Indonesia.

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82 “A diplomatic massacre,” *The Economist* (US), Vol. 321, 30 November 1991, pp. 36–37.

83 Pilger, “The secret history of Suharto’s bloody rise.”

84 Pilger, “The secret history of Suharto’s bloody rise.”

independence<sup>85</sup> — using nonviolence theory can be a fruitful exercise. An additional aim here is to draw attention to the limited action at other times, namely the previous decades of the repressive Suharto regime, especially during the 1965–1966 massacres and the 1975 invasion and subsequent occupation of East Timor. Although there was substantial opposition to Indonesian repression in these earlier years, there were also many who supported, condoned, or ignored it.

Our argument is that nonviolence theory can be enriched by studying occasions characterized by a relative lack of action, or insufficient action, in order to learn about barriers to action. Studying action must remain the centerpiece of the study of nonviolent action, but this needs to be supplemented by much more attention to periods and occasions where there are relatively low levels of action. The 1998 protests in Indonesia show what sort of people's action was possible, and throw into relief the relative lack of this scale of opposition at other times. Likewise, the 1999 protests in Australia against killings in East Timor show what sort of people's action was possible outside of Indonesia, and throw into relief the relative lack of this scale of opposition at other times, notably during the 1965–1966 massacres and during and after the 1975 invasion of East Timor.

We have mentioned some barriers to action in the course of our accounts of events.

- Social context, such as anticommunism, trade links, nationalism, domestic preoccupations, and prevailing attitudes about whether one should intervene, make judgments — or even be concerned — about affairs in other countries. (Feelings of insularity can wax and wane).

- Communication blockages, such as censorship and removal of radio transmitters.

- The mind set in Western governments, especially foreign affairs departments, which favors friendly relations with other governments as a form of “real-politik” in which moral issues should not intrude into foreign affairs, and rejects direct support for pro-democracy movements.

- News values in Western media that give priority to government perspectives.

For example, the 1998 protests leading to Suharto's resignation were aided by the social context of economic collapse and by email communication; at earlier times the barriers associated with social context and communication created much greater obstacles to action. In 1999, Australian mass media provided massive and to some extent crusading coverage of destruction and killing in East Timor, supporting and fostering popular protest that was sufficient to override the traditional mind set in Australian governments that favored good relations with the Indonesian regime above other considerations. In earlier times, the social context was less favorable, less information was available and media interest was far less, thus helping to explain the lower level of action against the 1965–1966 massacres and against the invasion and occupation of East Timor.

Finally, we point out that there has been brave and continual resistance to repression in Indonesia itself, East Timor, and in other countries where activists have struggled to draw attention to events in the archipelago. Their courageous protests have in their own way been the foundations for the greater actions that followed. However, we would hope that, by developing lessons and insights from such periods, in future similar struggles need not be as drawn out and action can more quickly move into a more effective phase.

In chapters 5, 6, and 7, we re-examine some of the barriers to effective communication against repression, aggression, and oppression, using perspectives from nonviolence theories and communication theories. Through an interplay between theory and case studies, it may be possible to develop insights that activists can use in ongoing struggles.

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85 Although these protests used many methods of nonviolent action, a primary demand by protesters was for military intervention against the killings, causing some complications in undertaking an analysis of these protests using nonviolence theory.

## Nonviolent resistance to Soviet repression

The Soviet Union provides an intriguing case history in nonviolent action and many of the issues relevant to it. The Union was largely born of nonviolent actions (along with parallel violence) in 1917, when strikes, factory occupations, demonstrations in the street, and other forms of resistance resulted in a *coup d'état* by the Bolsheviks. Ironically, street demonstrations and massive social resistance led to the defeat of another coup in 1991, signaling the end of the Soviet Union.

In between 1917 and 1991 (see chronology), there was much repression and the emergence of numerous strategies to deal with the repression in its varied stages. This chapter provides an overview of the forms and roles of dissent in the Soviet Union, focusing especially on nonviolent resistance to the 1991 attempted coup. It discusses how resistance differed during the different stages of repression that characterized the Soviet Union's years and poses possible reasons for the relatively low levels of action, before assessing what was and what might have been useful, what specific problems were faced, and how they might have been overcome. The role of international observers and supporters and their relative inaction through many of the worst times is also considered.

Three periods of particularly harsh repression stand out in the history of the Soviet Union: (1) forced collectivization; (2) the Stalin Terror; and (3) "re-stalinization" under Brezhnev. Each of these was met with resistance in some form but the impact of that resistance was not always even or clear. But before examining these three periods, we start with a discussion of the 1991 coup.

### Chronology of significant events in the Soviet Union

February 1917: Dictatorial ruler Tsar Nicholas II abdicates under huge public pressure. A provisional government is established.

October 1917: The Bolsheviks (Communist Party), led by Lenin, seize power from the provisional government.

1918–1920: Civil war between the Bolsheviks and the anti-Bolsheviks (the Whites). The West supports the Whites.

1922: Stalin is elected General Secretary of the Communist Party. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) is formed.

1924: Lenin dies and is succeeded by Alexei Rykov as Premier of USSR. Zinoviev and Kamenev form triumvirate with Stalin to rule USSR.

1928: After outmaneuvering the left, then the right, Stalin becomes the nation's leader. The first Five Year Plan is established.

1929: Agricultural collectivization begins and, with it, terrorization of peasants.

1932: Second Five Year Plan begins. Death penalty degree passed for stealing from collectives.

1933: Famine devastates USSR, largely as a result of rural turmoil.

1934: Kirov — a possible challenger to Stalin's power — is killed. The Great Purges begin.

1936: Beginning of show trials of Party leaders, including Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin, and Rykov.

1941: Germany invades the Soviet Union, which undergoes huge losses and is crucial in the Allies' victory.

1945: Germany surrenders. Western leaders look to the Soviet Union to help defeat Japan but are worried at the prospect of the USSR "sharing" in the triumph of that defeat. To hasten Japan's surrender before full Soviet involvement, atomic bombs are dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Cold War commences building and continues until 1989.

1953: Stalin dies and is replaced by Nikita Khrushchev.

1956: The Twentieth Party Congress hears in a "secret speech" by Khrushchev that Stalin was responsible for genocide and terror, allowed by a Cult of Personality which had developed around him. Soviet troops invade Hungary. Emergence of a questioning sub-culture in the USSR.

1964: Khrushchev becomes the first Soviet leader to be dismissed. He is replaced by Leonid Brezhnev.

1968: Soviet troops invade Czechoslovakia. Soviet citizens are arrested for protesting and are sent to labor camps. Dissent becomes more organized, especially with first publication of the *Chronicle of Current Events*.

1979: Soviet troops invade Afghanistan.

1982: Yuri Andropov is elected General Secretary of Communist Party, following Brezhnev's death.

1984: Andropov dies and is replaced by Konstantin Chernenko.

1985: Michail Gorbachev is elected as leader, after Chernenko's death.

1986: Gorbachev introduces mechanisms for a more open society (glasnost) and for economic restructuring (perestroika).

1989: People power topples Eastern European communist regimes.

1990: Following growth of the Baltic nationalist movement, Lithuanians elect a pro-independence parliament and begin protesting strongly for independence. Boris Yeltsin becomes chairman of the Russian Supreme Soviet and declares that Russian laws take precedence over Soviet laws.

1991: In response to Gorbachev's announcement that the leaders of 10 republics have agreed on a new Union treaty, an Emergency Committee is formed and attempts a coup. Nonviolent action begins immediately. Several days later the coup is defeated but the event weighs heavily against Gorbachev and the Communist Party, bringing about the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union.

### Resisting the 1991 coup

In August 1991 a group calling itself the Emergency Committee detained Soviet President Michael Gorbachev in his Crimean dacha and attempted a coup. Headed by Vice-President Gennadi Yanayev, the coup was largely an effort to block moves by Gorbachev to decentralize the Soviet Union, with ultimate independence for the republics. However it also stemmed from apprehension by political conservatives about the new democratic terrain into which Gorbachev had led the USSR. Some top Communist Party officials and bureaucrats felt that power was slipping away from the party, from them personally, and from the Soviet government which had long tried to assert the Soviet Union as a leading nation in world directions and political thought.

The collapse of the Eastern bloc had been made possible by Gorbachev's declared

unwillingness to support the previously entrenched Brezhnev doctrine whereby the Soviet government intervened in the political affairs of its neighbors to ensure that its own interests prevailed<sup>1</sup>. This had led to the demise of the Cold War, which had propped up a great many myths, ideologies, and rationales in both the US and the USSR. These had lost their credibility with subsequent repercussions on the Soviet home front. But Gorbachev had also introduced a wide range of reforms domestically. After many years of stagnation under previous policies, these reforms did not run altogether smoothly, allowing conservatives to complain that the nation was in shambles.

Thus the coup leaders justified their August actions by reference to the troubled state of affairs throughout the Soviet Union. The Committee voided what it deemed to be “unconstitutional laws,” banned strikes, rallies, and demonstrations, closed down all liberal newspapers and those it felt it could not trust, dispatched columns of tanks to Baltic capitals and to Moscow and Leningrad, and announced the takeover of the media and many other facilities.

Among the first moves of the Emergency Committee was to put all military units on alert, ordering them to occupy Moscow and prepare for battle. Although an elite unit was ordered to arrest Boris Yeltsin, this was never carried out, probably due to divisions in the ranks of those ordered to make the arrest.<sup>2</sup> By 9am Moscow time, the first military units were taking up strategic positions in the capital, with a column of 25 armored personnel carriers, staffed with paratroopers, parked outside Moscow City Hall. The KGB (secret police) had been put on early alert and had

prepared a Moscow command bunker for use by the coup leaders if the need arose.<sup>3</sup>

On awaking to the news that Gorbachev was ill and that an Emergency Committee had taken over, many citizens realized that there had been a coup. Muscovites had the tanks in the street to further demonstrate that likelihood. Resistance started immediately, with many workers striking or simply staying away from work. This took place across the USSR, from the coal-mining regions of Siberia to the huge military-industrial complexes of Gorky.<sup>4</sup>

People gathered at major city points in Moscow, such as Manezh Square and outside the Russian Parliament. When the state-controlled television program *Vremya* showed an uncensored snippet of Yeltsin on a tank outside the Russian parliament, many more people were roused to join the protests.

Faced with huge opposition, the coup leaders issued plans for the demonstrations to be broken up. One factory was ordered to urgently send a quarter of a million pairs of handcuffs to Moscow in readiness for mass arrests. Vladimir Kruchkov, one of the members of the Emergency Committee and head of the KGB, ordered two floors of the Lefortovo Prison in central Moscow to be cleared. There is no question that the coup leaders intended to move forward with their plans but these became unstuck at the point of execution and even prior to it. For instance, the putschists' plans were leaked to Yeltsin and demonstrators at the Russian Parliament were given fliers outlining the plans for how their resistance was to be crushed. Many wept and troops present had an opportunity to contemplate what role they might play for or against the coup as the orders came down. There was also the story of at least one KGB agent walking around the city, ensuring that he was incommunicado so that he could not be ordered to take part in the putschists' plot.

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1 See Ralph Summy and Michael E. Salla (eds.), *Why the Cold War Ended: A Range of Interpretations* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995).

2 Monica Attard, *Russia: Which Way Paradise?* (Sydney: Doubleday, 1997), p. 175.

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3 Jeff Trimble and Peter Vassiliev, “Three days that shook the world,” *U.S. News & World Report*, Vol. 111, 18 November 1991, pp. 54–62.

4 Attard, *Russia: Which Way Paradise?*, p. 184.



A tense situation saw three people shot dead at Manezh Square on the second day of the coup when soldiers became frightened. The crowd expressed anger, fear, and grief. This may have led other soldiers to ponder what they would do in a similar situation. Many of them were already empathizing with the demonstrators. By the third day many of them were openly saying that they would not shoot the protesters. This was in fact the final blow to the coup.

In confrontations such as those between the protesters and the Soviet soldiers there are complicated dynamics at work. It is crucial to success that resisters, as much as possible, avoid a process whereby each party constructs an image of the other as enemy. James A. Aho has identified a number of ingredients in such a process. Among those relevant to encounters between soldiers and citizens are myth making that too easily categorizes the other party and expects certain negative behavior on their part to be inevitable and predictable. These can become self-fulfilling prophecies as each party responds to the other within ritualistic patterns that confirm their worst suspicions.<sup>5</sup> Those who view themselves as acting righteously — and each of the parties are likely to regard themselves so — “respond ‘appropriately’ to those they have designated as evil [or as enemy] — with secrecy, caution, cunning, and, if necessary, cruelty. To act in any other way would be imprudent.”<sup>6</sup> We would not expect nonviolent activists to act cruelly, of course, but soldiers who believe the worst of these demonstrators may still view them as threatening in other more subtle but poorly understood ways.

It is important, therefore, to treat soldiers with respect, appeal to their humanity and decency, and hope it has not been extinguished by military training and indoctrination.

By late morning of 21 August the tanks that had been patrolling the Kremlin had been recalled. The putschists tried to escape but were arrested in a sure sign that the coup had failed. Several top officials and party heads who had supported the coup suicided, at least one also killing his wife.<sup>7</sup> These suicides/killings probably constitute the bulk of the deaths related to the coup (though they are of course much less celebrated than the deaths of protesters at Manezh Square).

If the coup leaders made one crucial mistake, it was thinking that the Soviet citizenry would simply go along with the fate decided for them at higher levels. It seems they also misjudged the amount of military support they would get, although this itself was, arguably, connected with the strength of the resistance which signaled to the armed forces that this was not a coup to be supported. The air force in particular was anxious not to become involved in an attack on Soviet citizens and many mayors and other leaders were appealing directly to the military to defy the Emergency Committee's orders.

The resistance could be seen as a mixture of indignation, ingenuity, and hardened resolve to reject a return to repression. It bore the signs of a people having had a taste of freedom under glasnost and not wanting to retreat, as illustrated by one Muscovite who joined the protests, declaring that “... for years nothing but obedience and inertia was pounded in to my brain.” But now that a government that she had help elect was under threat, she vowed to ignore the curfew and let tanks roll over her if necessary.<sup>8</sup>

Also evident were signs of the re-emergence of previously used techniques of underground organization, such as publication of underground newspapers and people pulling their old short-wave radios out of mothballs. Citizens commented that they hadn't used

5 James A. Aho, *This Thing of Darkness: A Sociology of the Enemy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), pp. 29–30. See also Sam Keen, *Faces of the Enemy: Reflections of the Hostile Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986).

6 Aho, *This Thing of Darkness*, p. 31.

7 Attard, *Russia: Which Way Paradise?*, pp. 197–202.

8 Gladys D. Ganley, *Unglued Empire: The Soviet Experience with Communications Technologies* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1996), p. 144.

these for years but were pleased not to have got rid of them. The experience from earlier days of dissent served the resisters well and the fact that short-wave radios were plentiful was of further benefit to the struggle.

However, if dissidents of previous eras had come largely from the intelligentsia, albeit with a diversity of interests, concerns, and ideologies but all with the common desire to express their opinions freely, those who resisted the coup appeared to have come from a more diverse background. While the intelligentsia and middle classes made up a large proportion of the resistance, workers also joined the demonstrations and played their own role. The trade union movement in Leningrad was particularly strong in the resistance, with calls for strikes widespread on workers' placards at the large demonstration in Palace Square, where at least 100,000 people gathered. The city's Kirov tractor factory, with 30,000 workers, became a strong center of resistance, using its fax machines to transmit speeches of defiance and support. Workers at that factory spoke openly and enthusiastically of a campaign of civil disobedience.

Media workers played their own role and were involved in ways that had not been possible during the pre-glasnost days, using ploys of broadcasting and reporting details and information which surely went against the coup initiators and constantly showed them to be on shaky ground. In a threatening situation such as a coup, especially if there is a background such as the Soviet Union had, many people inevitably lie low and see which way the wind blows, fearing that, if there is a new wave of repression, the regime may retaliate against open opponents. The part played by media workers served to embolden those who, even though ideologically opposed to the coup, may otherwise have been inclined to lie low.

The nonviolent actions undertaken by the resisters warrant discussion, both for their having been shaped, to some extent, by the history of resistance in the Soviet Union, as we shall later see, and for what they tell us about how coups may be resisted generally. Resistance fell into the categories of organizational,

symbolic, supportive, and designed to influence others. Some of these categories obviously overlap. For instance, when the crowd at Moscow's Manezh Square joined hands to block the entry of armored personnel carriers, this fell across all categories, being highly visible, obviously nonviolent, displaying and invoking group solidarity, and making it psychologically difficult, though certainly not physically impossible, for the armed troops to proceed. Overlap of categories is also seen in leaflets and posters, which involved organization in terms of getting them produced, reproduced, and disseminated but which were also aimed at gaining support of others and influencing those who were wary about joining the actions.

Strikes, although usually of an organizational nature with their economic ramifications and political potential, can be highly symbolic. This was certainly the case with the one-person strike conducted by Vladimir Petrik, chief of an assembly division at a factory implicated in military equipment.<sup>9</sup> Petrik, at risk of jeopardizing his job, was determined to oppose the passive acceptance evident at his factory and to show that a person can take an individual stand on issues.

One of the most active groups was the Memorial Society, established to assist victims of Stalin. Members collected all the paper they could gather from offices and elsewhere, produced a vast number of leaflets, and distributed them on the streets. One distributor expected trouble when he was approached by two policemen. But it turned out that they were eager to have the leaflet to keep abreast of the news, suggesting the widespread support for the resistance.<sup>10</sup>

Communication was paramount, from the slogans and hastily made placards demanding "No to the Fascist Junta!" to the 20,000 copies

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9 Vladimir Petrik, "Moscow's MV Khrunichev machine-building factory reacts to the August coup," in Victoria E. Bonnell, Ann Cooper, and Gregory Freidin (eds.), *Russia at the Barricades: Eyewitness Accounts of the August 1991 Coup* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), pp. 111–119.

10 Ganley, *Unglued Empire*, p. 156.

of Yeltsin's decrees run off by the Mayor of Ryazan, to the ham radios that kept events alive. It was not just about convincing trusted friends, as had so often been the thrust of the communicative efforts of previous Soviet dissidents. Photocopies announcing the demonstration at the Russian White House were pasted up on the Metro walls and at least one woman heading towards the demonstration begged people heading the other way to join the demonstration.<sup>11</sup> Those opposing the coup knew they had to act swiftly and decisively to maximize the effectiveness of their efforts. They had to convince great numbers of total strangers, including, perhaps most importantly, the soldiers who had been sent to oppose them. In convincing the soldiers of the worthiness of their cause, or at least that there were no real grounds for animosity and that the soldiers should not shoot if ordered to do so, the demonstrators had several advantages, ironically linked to militaristic and imperialistic policies of the Soviet Union.

One was that, due to the Soviet Union's program of national (military) service, most troops were conscripts who did not have the strong commitment to their job that might generally be expected of those who join the armed services voluntarily. Opponents therefore felt they could appeal to them more convincingly. Additionally, many civilians had their own experience of military service which provided insights into how best to apply pressure to the troops. Secondly, the Soviet government, with a somewhat imperialistic attitude towards many of the smaller and further flung republics, had a history of trying to "Russify" the country. As part of this process, Soviet leaders gave heavy priority to having the Russian language taught and understood as widely as possible. This meant that protesters could converse with most of the troops, regardless of where they were from.

Of course, the bulk of the armed forces sent to the Russian White House were Russian and this itself was important. Boris Yeltsin had

only recently been popularly elected as President of Russia and many soldiers were thought to have voted for him. As he clambered on the tanks and spoke forcefully against the coup, many of the soldiers would therefore have considered him to represent the voice of legitimate Russian authority.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the discussions initiated and pleas made directly to the soldiers by the demonstrators, who sought to identify with the soldiers and seek a show of humanity, seem to have been crucial. Numerous nonviolent struggles, especially against repressive regimes, have succeeded or failed largely on the basis of whether they have been able to overcome the image of themselves as the enemy in their encounters with armed forces. Arguably, this was a telling factor in Burma in 1988 when, despite the determined efforts of nonviolent protesters who knelt before soldiers and pleaded with them to join their cause, the soldiers massacred the demonstrators.<sup>13</sup> Soviet citizens seem to have been more successful, even without any prominently outspoken leaders of nonviolence. This suggests that the issue of seeking solidarity with soldiers who might otherwise see resisters as enemies is a delicate and complex one. Some of the protesters sought to define the moral grounds of the encounter, with one woman asking a soldier: "Do you know what you're doing?" When he shook his head, she responded "Then go back to your barracks like a noble Soviet soldier and leave us in peace!"<sup>14</sup>

As well as pleading, arguing, and joking with the soldiers, protesters shared sweets and cigarettes with them and tried to find common grounds for a relationship in which they could not easily be perceived as enemy. A row of women held a sign: "Soldiers! Don't shoot

11 Jeremy Gambrell, "Seven days that shook the world," *New York Review of Books*, Vol. 38, No. 15, 26 September 1991, pp. 56–61.

12 Geoffrey Hosking, "The roots of dissolution," *New York Review of Books*, Vol. 39, No. 1–2, 16 January 1992, pp. 34–38.

13 Alan Clements, "Introduction," in Aung San Suu Kyi, *The Voice of Hope: Conversations with Alan Clements* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1997), pp. xi–xx, at pp. xiii–xiv.

14 Attard, *Russia: Which Way Paradise?*, p. 181.

your people.” These sorts of appeals may well have reached their target as, when a foreign reporter climbed on to a tank and asked a commander if he would shoot, if ordered, he stopped and thought before replying “You know, I’m Russian, just like all of them. I think I’d rather go to jail for treason than shoot at my own people.”<sup>15</sup>

Discussing the issues with soldiers was not confined to the barricades, although that was a telling point of the encounter between potentially opposed forces. Moscow-area Supreme Soviet deputies organized themselves to visit military bases and installations in their region to acquaint armed forces personnel with Yeltsin’s address and decrees and to win support. The All-Union Soviet of the Parents of Military Personnel tried collective parental persuasion in calling on all officers, soldiers, and sailors to oppose the coup.<sup>16</sup>

The barricades took on important functional and symbolic roles. In Leningrad a caravan of water trucks blocked approaches to the Palace Square, an activity that was self-generated, as many of the activities were.<sup>17</sup> Taking a more offensive approach, Leningrad taxi drivers, using their taxi radios to coordinate their movements, organized themselves into a fleet to scout around the suburbs looking for tanks or other early signs of attack so that prior warning could be given to demonstrators. In Moscow, couriers on bikes sped through the city and around the obstructions, bringing news and messages to and among resisters. A hot line was set up so people could report troop movements in their neighborhoods and give information on where stations could be heard, to overcome jamming.<sup>18</sup>

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15 Attard, *Russia: Which Way Paradise?*, pp. 182–83.

16 *Coup in the Soviet Union. Day 1. 18–19 August 1991. A Minute-By-Minute Chronology*, <http://artnet.net/~upstart/1819aug.html>.

17 Valerii Zavorotnyi, “Letter from St Petersburg,” in Bonnell, Cooper, and Freidin, *Russia at the Barricades*, pp. 147–157, at p. 155.

18 Gambrell, “Seven days that shook the world.”

The symbolism of the barricades was evident by the piles of rubble and material taken from unfinished buildings, plentiful around Moscow.<sup>19</sup> The hastily torn-up roads and fragments of reinforced concrete sent sure signs that behind them stood those who were willing to resist. Following initial confrontation with soldiers, there were flowers adorning the tanks at the barricade and children climbing over them, playing, giving evidence of the nonviolent nature of the resistance and the likelihood that their actions had almost certainly been successful. This military equipment had been transformed, “if not into ploughshares, then into a heavy-duty tenement jungle gym.”<sup>20</sup>

Organizational aspects were just as prominent with a mobile medical treatment center established at the large Moscow demonstration and ambulances on standby in case of the attack that was expected. People were instructed in how to best deal with gas attacks and makeshift equipment towards this end was shared around. Some set up stalls where coffee and other refreshments were dispensed free to the demonstrators to keep up their morale and physical strength. Strategies were employed to protect the demonstrators and the broadcasting equipment on the White House. All the lights at the White House were turned off at night, so that they would not illuminate the broadcasters and make them easy targets for snipers who were reported to have been set up across the river in the Ukraine Hotel.<sup>21</sup>

These examples show how diverse the resistance was in terms of both action and deliberate non-action. It included physical obstruction, graffiti, slogans, pleading with soldiers, defying curfews, refusal to obey orders, compromising and re-interpreting orders, seeking outside support, and attending to the physical needs and morale of demonstrators. It also seems very likely to have included some intentional inefficiency. While

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19 Gregory Freidin, “To the barricades,” in Bonnell, Cooper, and Freidin, pp. 71–77, at p. 74.

20 Freidin, “To the barricades,” p. 74.

21 Gambrell, “Seven days that shook the world.”

Martin Malia claims that "... the cabinet, the Party leadership, the three high officers of the KGB and the Army ... had to be capable of ineptitude and miscalculation on a Homeric scale,"<sup>22</sup> it seems more plausible that at least some of these displayed "deliberate ineptitude," something much closer to disobedience.

For instance, although the KGB did close Radio Moscow, they did not arrest Yeltsin, as ordered. Indeed they provided positive support, a network of informers passing on to him intelligence on the plotters' plans.<sup>23</sup> It is difficult to separate ineptitude from noncooperation, much more again to guess the motivations for noncooperation. This is especially the case since some in the KGB, and especially in its upper echelons, may have had more sinister motivations than those of the protesters who essentially wanted democracy to prevail. There are many conflicting claims about whether an order for Yeltsin's arrest was issued and, if so, whether it was rescinded or ignored. Victor Karpukhin, Commander of the KGB's special Alpha Team, claims that he was responsible for seeing to Yeltsin's arrest but boasts "I did everything I could to do nothing," a good recipe for noncooperation, even if his intentions were not clear.<sup>24</sup>

Likewise, there were examples of the military both acting against and for the coup, confirming ambivalence in the upper ranks. Some television and radio centers were closed down while others were left open, especially in further out towns such as Irkutsk and Tomsk, where political leaders opposing the coup appeared on television denouncing the putschists and inviting people to join demonstrations. Mayor Sobchak of Leningrad attributed the KGB's and military's reluctance to

throw their weight behind the coup to the presence of a strong civilian resistance.

Even where television centers were closed down or their broadcasting severely curtailed, media workers, as mentioned, contributed to a tide of anger against and ridicule of the coup. The ridicule included careful attention to showing Yanayev's shaking hands at the press conference called by the putschists, as well as several embarrassingly blunt questions being put.<sup>25</sup> These would have been an encouraging sign to those who wanted to openly oppose the coup. There was also feigned inability to edit from the press conference those pieces that the coup leader requested be cut, as well as subtle selection of music to accompany the television blackout. For instance, a concert hall production of Boris Godunov, "an operatic blast at regicides, silent majorities and pretenders" was among these.<sup>26</sup>

Newspaper workers also took a stand, including workers for those few newspapers that were officially allowed to remain operating and that the Emergency Committee felt it could trust. Printers at *Izvestia* refused to print the paper unless it contained Yeltsin's anti-coup declaration. Meanwhile, journalists from suspended radical newspapers immediately started producing makeshift newspapers and leaflets. When workers from the independent newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, banned by the Emergency Committee, prepared a four-page proof for Monday's edition, only to find that the state printing office, fearing repercussions, would not print it, the edition was faxed to France for translation and publication there. *Liberation* of Paris faxed the *Gazeta* workers, urging them to "keep up the good work."<sup>27</sup> Twenty-five *Gazeta* workers then stayed at the office through Monday night, putting together a new edition of *A Chronicle of Events of August*, a play on the name of the samizdat publication of the Brezhnev era. One thousand copies were posted in prominent places around

22 Martin Malia, "The August Revolution," *New York Review of Books*, Vol. 38, No. 15, 26 September 1991, pp. 22–27.

23 Trimble and Vassiliev, "Three days that shook the world."

24 Peter Reddaway and Dmitri Glinski, *The Tragedy of Russia's Reforms: Market Bolshevism against Democracy* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001), p. 205.

25 Reddaway and Glinski, *The Tragedy of Russia's Reforms*, p. 214.

26 Freidin, "To the barricades," p. 72.

27 Ganley, *Unglued Empire*, p. 155.

Moscow, along with other newsletters, many of which had been published by other banned newspapers.

Also acting in the tradition of samizdat, journalists from prohibited newspapers illegally edited and published a paper called *Obshchaya Gazeta*, translating as *United Newspaper*. It was distributed all over Moscow, free of charge, and played a strong part in keeping the population up to date with events and resistance to the coup.<sup>28</sup> The staff of *Rosier* set themselves up at the Russian White House, from where they produced one edition of their newspaper and 42 different leaflets, as well as duplicating dozens of Yeltsin's appeals and decrees.

Efforts to maintain broadcasts were another area where resisters needed to outwit the plotters. The independent radio station Moscow Echo continuously transmitted Yeltsin's declarations, despite being closed down by the junta several times. Ham radio operators, to stay on air, had to constantly change frequency to circumvent jamming, further outwitting the would-be jammers with use of jargon.<sup>29</sup> The whole resistance movement was remarkable for its ability to think creatively and improvise, as had often been the case in a country where people adapted available materials to meet their needs, including making their own satellite dishes and using the emulsion of discarded x-ray plates to make recordings.

Not that new technologies were scorned or forgotten, at least not by resisters. Although e-mail and fax facilities were recent to the Soviet Union and still scarce, people took great advantage of these wherever they were available, sending messages overseas and asking for international support, as well as

passing on information within the country.<sup>30</sup> GlasNet, a dial-up network and joint international venture commenced in the glasnost and perestroika era, provided information on events in Moscow and Leningrad via news feeds from CNN and the BBC. The volume of traffic became so heavy that networkers were asked not to flood the lines with questions but to leave the lines open for posting vital information.<sup>31</sup>

RELCOM, a provider of e-mail and news and linked with EUnet, the European UNIX network, also proved useful. One resister, who was busily using this service while others were out at demonstrations, commented "... Thank Heaven, they don't consider RELCOM mass media or they simply forgot about it."<sup>32</sup>

Clearly, a wide array of strategies were used and available technologies, while certainly not as advanced or as widespread as in many countries, appear to have been used to their maximum. There were far more Soviet citizens with technical know-how than there was sophisticated equipment, yet for communication purposes the will to communicate and the ability to think of ways and means to do this most effectively, including overcoming jamming and circumventing other obstacles, is probably much more important than the technology itself.

The West appears to have played a relatively minor role in the resistance, except in the area of communication where its involvement may have been crucial. Even prior to the coup, US intelligence agencies had been helping Yeltsin improve his personal security arrangements and the security of his communication system. During the coup the

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28 We thank Valentin Bazhanov (personal communication, July 2000) for this information.

29 Anton Rebezov and Dima Guskov, "The 'White House' Operation," *QST* (official monthly journal of the American Radio Relay League), November 1991.

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30 Bob Travica and Matthew Hogan, "Computer networks in the X-USSR: technology, uses and social effects," *Proceedings of the ASIS Annual Meeting*, Vol. 29, 1992, pp. 120-135.

31 Travica and Hogan, "Computer networks in the X-USSR," p. 128.

32 David Alan Bozak and Larry Press, "The Internet as an information resource," <http://www.funet.fi/pub/culture/russian/politics/coup/papers/BozakPress>.

US Embassy sent a communication specialist to the Russian White House with portable telephone equipment to enable Yeltsin to make secure phone calls to military commanders and others. The US National Security Agency, in a rare display of its everyday monitoring skills, made available to Yeltsin real-time reports of calls made by members of the Emergency Committee on their special government telephones.<sup>33</sup>

While this information possibly contributed to defeating the coup, it must be stressed that Yeltsin had access to it only because the US government had by then deemed it to be in its own interests. Nonviolent activists cannot normally count on such assistance and may even have cause to worry about the motivations of those who provide such information.

Meanwhile anti-coup activists sought a different sort of assistance from the West and used available communication technology towards these ends. As the coup perpetrators moved to close down the liberal media and jam short-wave radios, Soviet resisters found it helpful to directly tell their story outside of the Soviet Union, hoping that this would not only bring pressure to bear from the West but that, probably more importantly, the news would find its way back in to a multitude of recipients. This seems to have worked well and there is no doubt that the resistance was pleased to have the ear of the outside world. However, there was no direct overseas support for the resistance. It was mainly psychological support and complementary media support. At a US college a Chinese student with experience of the protests in Tiananmen Square summed it up: "Western sympathy amounts to little in changing the situation. The Soviet people are their own savior."<sup>34</sup>

Some of the lessons which can be drawn from the success of the resistance relate to the possible vulnerability of the military forces for any group staging a coup; the volatility of situations, so that initial, well organized resistance can gather momentum and force the coup organizers to retreat; the importance of symbolism; and the benefits of thinking innovatively and planning ahead.

Years before the Soviet coup, Adam Roberts made the point that coups have a certain vulnerability, not least among the armed forces, and that this might be even more so where the military forces have a large component of conscripts.<sup>35</sup> There is an irony in that nonviolent activists are usually opposed to conscription, yet here, as with the forced use of Russian language throughout the USSR, opponents were able to use this to their own advantage.

It is clear that symbolism, where used, enhanced the resistance efforts. One of symbolism's contributions can be to provide a succinct sense of what the problem is and what needs to be done, where censorship, physical obstructions, and time restraints might stop the full gamut of arguments from being put. The throngs with their arms linked bravely as they confronted the tanks that might run them down, the flowers decking the tanks, and the posters pasted over the normally scrupulously unmarked walls of the metro stations exclaimed loudly that a resistance was underway and nonviolent in nature. Where symbols clearly expressed that nonviolence, they may have been even more effective.

Even from the successes, we can see how things might have been done better. One of our areas of discomfort about the remarkable and praiseworthy defeat of the coup was that Yeltsin appears to have been too strong a focus. There are several problems with this. Had he been arrested — and perhaps it was only by some stroke of fate and a particular

33 Reddaway and Glinski, *The Tragedy of Russia's Reforms*, p. 203. Reddaway and Glinski point out that the National Security Agency opposed sharing intercepted information with Yeltsin, fearing it would compromise future surveillance.

34 Rogers Cadenhead, "Computer networks kept information flowing during coup," 22 August 1991,

<http://www.funet.fi/pub/culture/russian/politics/coup/papers/Cadenhead>.

35 Adam Roberts, "Civil resistance to military coups," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 12, 1975, pp. 19–36, at p. 31.

personality in the KGB that he wasn't — could the protesters have rallied in the same way? We will never know, of course, but it makes good sense not to be too reliant on a particular personality. The transmission of his decrees appeared to have taken up a great deal of the energy and direction of the underground media. It would be nice to think that, without these decrees, they could have put together strong and powerful arguments of their own. Their case certainly deserved that.

Another of the problems with the appeals to and reliance on Yeltsin is that much of what he said was nationalistic, directed at replacing the Soviet Union as the “motherland” with Russia. This was not the root of the problem and at times it seems that there was a risk of confusing the issues of democracy and patriotism. Moreover, history has shown Yeltsin to be a perpetual opportunist with little commitment to democracy, despite the rhetoric he used at times.<sup>36</sup>

Historically the Russian people have frequently expected and even turned to strong leaders and there can be some advantages to this. A strong nonviolent leader can be critical to the success of a campaign, providing direction, eliminating confusion, and becoming a symbol of resistance that aids mobilization. However, Yeltsin was neither Gandhi nor Martin Luther King and appears to have used the mobilization for his own purposes. Activists need to be watchful of emerging leaders and to constantly reassess their commitment to the cause and to nonviolence, for leaders' prominence and status can be used as fast lanes to their own self-interested goals.

One of the major lessons is about preparedness. It is a characteristic of coups that the resistance is usually not prepared for them. Soviet citizens, despite the warning of ex-Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze several months earlier that a coup was in the offing, were still largely caught by surprise. However, while they might not have been mentally or organizationally prepared, nor were they caught as short of preparation as some others

might be in similar circumstances. They at least had some experience of the sorts of measures introduced by the Emergency Committee and some sort of equipment and knowledge of how to move into underground mode. One resister boasted how quickly they had been able to “shift to underground,” having organized “reserve nodes, backup channel and hidden locations. They'll have a hard time catching us!”<sup>37</sup> This ability to move swiftly to new modes of operation may have considerable advantage. It is an advantage that nonviolent activists can work towards with forethought and preparation.

Another major lesson is about aiming for inclusiveness of as many groups as possible and taking notes of their strengths, talents, and weaknesses. Resistance may come from some sections of the population more than others and in the case of the Soviet coup it was more widespread among the intelligentsia and middle classes. There can also be considerable geographical variations. Leningrad was by far the most outspoken city against the coup, perhaps partly because of the influence of Mayor Sobchak but mainly because of its strong revolutionary tradition.<sup>38</sup> Preparation for nonviolent action might then include consideration of the strengths, weaknesses, and possible roles of different regions and cities, particularly those where it seems that support for nonviolent resistance might be strongest, for instance where the trade union movement has been heavily involved in social as well as industrial issues and where there is civic pride about that social consciousness.

Perhaps Mayor Sobchak best summed it up: “... it might have been a successful coup, with far-reaching implications, *had the people remained silent.*”<sup>39</sup>

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36 Reddaway and Glinski, *The Tragedy of Russia's Reforms*.

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37 Bozak and Press, “The Internet as an information resource.”

38 Joseph Scholmer, *Vorkuta* (New York: Henry Holt, 1954), p. 256.

39 Ganley, *Unglued Empire*, p. 134. Emphasis in the original.



## Early cases of resistance to Soviet power

At many times in the USSR's history, a great many people have been silent and others have spoken out, sometimes at great cost. These periods tell us something about successful resistance and the reason for a relative dearth of action. The first period of marked oppression was when forced collectivization took place.<sup>40</sup>

The history of the Soviet Union was beleaguered by agricultural crises. An old joke quipped "What are the four greatest problems facing Soviet agriculture?" The answer: "Winter, spring, summer, and autumn." The joke gives evidence of the common belief that the problems were other than (or at least additional to) the largely inhospitable climate of much of the region which made up the Union, and that Soviet leaders had a penchant for blaming anything but their own policies. This was certainly the case with Stalin's forced collectivization and his accusation that the kulaks were the source of all agricultural woes.

During most of the 1920s there were debates among the Bolsheviks as to whether agricultural collectivization should be pushed ahead rapidly or whether it should be a slower process, taking into account the anxieties of peasants and trying to educate them rather than force them into collectives against their wishes. The peasants had already had a bad time of it during the Civil War which followed the Revolution when Soviet power was challenged from both within and from abroad, and the "Scissors Crisis" which was the name given to the situation resulting from the prices paid to peasants for their surplus having been kept low while the price of materials they needed to purchase rose dramatically. Because the USSR had no foreign sources of financial credit, the government sought to maximize

grain for sale abroad in order to generate foreign currency to support its plans for rapid industrialization. The peasants, already feeling squeezed, resisted these attempts and became generally less supportive of the Bolsheviks and their program, though many of them had previously been enthusiastic about the Revolution.<sup>41</sup> However, rather than ease the pressure, Stalin launched attacks on the agricultural sector and especially the kulaks, the better-off peasants. The leaders of the Soviet Union had a vision for agriculture, heavily influenced by rationalist ideas and notions that bigger is better, and they conceded little to the peasantry in terms of acknowledging their experience and in-the-field knowledge of agriculture.<sup>42</sup>

Part of Stalin's speech to agrarian Marxists in 1929 hints at his callousness and willingness for terror: "Taking the offensive against the kulaks means preparing for action to deal the kulak class such a blow that it will no longer rise to its feet. ... When the head is off, one does not grieve for the hair." He further went on to question whether kulaks should be allowed to join collective farms, answering his own question: "Of course not, for they are the sworn enemies of the collective farm movement."<sup>43</sup> This meant the kulaks could neither continue farming privately nor join collectives. Instead they were deported, along with others who resisted collectivization, to labor camps in the far north and in Siberia. Kulaks were almost completely liquidated in the course of 1930.<sup>44</sup>

Collectivization did not affect all parts of the USSR equally. Stalin used the policy to intimidate Ukrainians and give them their

40 For a full account of the forced collectivization and its impacts, particularly the resulting famine, see Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* (London: Hutchinson, 1986).

41 Jerry F. Hogan and Merle Fainsod, *How the Soviet Union is Governed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 72.

42 James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 193–222.

43 Martin McCauley, *The Soviet Union, 1917–1991* (London: Longman, 1993, 2nd ed.), pp. 81–82.

44 McCauley, *The Soviet Union, 1917–1991*, p. 82.

“come-uppance.” The Ukraine was one of the more productive agricultural regions so the particularly harsh treatment meted out there resulted in seriously decreased production, contributing greatly to the ensuing famine. Another particularly affected area was Kazakhstan where a large nomadic population with no knowledge or experience of cereal cropping was forced into collectivized cereal farms with disastrous results. Between 1.3 and 1.8 million Kazakh nomads are estimated to have died through this collectivization.<sup>45</sup>

It is not surprising that there was resistance. Historian Sheila Fitzpatrick has noted that Russian peasants had a tradition of violent rebellions against landowners and officials.<sup>46</sup> Much of the resistance to forced collectivization was of a limited and short-term nature, aimed at making the new collectives unworkable. The feeling among the resistant peasants was that, if they weren’t allowed to keep their livestock and implements, then they would ensure that the collective would not get them either. There are stories of peasants breaking their implements, slaughtering all their livestock and gluttonizing on the meat of their kill. “The peasants had a feast. Between 1928 and 1933 they slaughtered 26.6 million cattle or 46.6 per cent of the total Soviet herd.”<sup>47</sup> Such behavior was an invitation to famine, an impact that they perhaps thought would stop the government in its tracks. Unfortunately, Stalin did not abound with rationality, humanity, or common sense. A serious famine did occur, the collectivization continued, and that part of the protest — to the extent that it was a protest — seems to have been largely ineffective in halting the program, although Stalin, in his usual erratic way, did relax the collectivization efforts for some time in 1930, at least to allow the spring sowing.

Resistance at times took on a more pointed and spectacular form, not always nonviolent. For instance, 30,000 fires were registered in Russia alone during just one year of the forced collectivization and many, perhaps most, of these were attributed to arson as many peasants set fires of destruction as part of their protest.<sup>48</sup> Among the campaigns of protests were actions by peasant women, referred to as *bab’i bunt*, loosely translated as “women’s riots.” These often took the form of what was judged to be “female hysteria, irrational behavior, unorganized and inarticulate protest, and violent actions.”<sup>49</sup> However, L. Viola has made a strong case that the women were taking advantage of gender stereotypes, particularly via the greater leeway given to women protesters.

The nature of one *bab’i bunt* in the Ukraine illustrates how women dealt with the day-to-day realities of forced collectivization being forced upon them:

A crowd of women stormed the kolkhoz [collective farm] stables and barns. They cried, screamed, wailed, demanding their cows and seed back. The men stood a way off, in clusters, sullenly silent. Some of the lads had pitchforks, stakes, axes tucked in their sashes. The terrified granary man ran away; the women tore off the bolts and together with the men began dragging out the bags of seed.<sup>50</sup>

Viola claims that the *bab’i bunt* demonstrated a significant degree of organization and conscious political opposition and that they may well have played an important role in the

45 Robert Service, *A History of Twentieth Century Russia* (London: Allen Lane, 1997), pp. 201–202.

46 Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 20.

47 McCauley, *The Soviet Union, 1917–1991*, p. 83.

48 L. Viola, “Bab’i bunt and peasant women’s protest during collectivization,” in Chris Ward (ed.), *The Stalinist Dictatorship* (London: Arnold, 1998), pp. 213–231, at p. 214.

49 Viola, “Bab’i bunt and peasant women’s protest during collectivization,” p. 213.

50 Viola, “Bab’i bunt and peasant women’s protest during collectivization,” p. 224.

amendment of policies and practices.<sup>51</sup> Certainly, they posed problems for the local cadres whose task it was to put Stalin's collectivization plans into practice.<sup>52</sup> There were instances of women peasants bringing their children to protests with them, thus causing further headaches to the cadres, and also of the women laying down in front of tractors to block collectivization. They were also often nominated by the men as the spokespeople of the movement against collectivization, with men insisting that the women would simply make a larger din if they were not allowed to voice their opposition. Women also took advantage of the tendency for women not to be prosecuted under the relevant article of the criminal code when their opposition led to court actions.<sup>53</sup> It was often the women who would initiate that opposition and they would take it through particularly those parts of the resistance process where women were thought to have less vulnerability than men. Once more they were taking advantage of gendered stereotypes whereby women were not presumed to play such a key role in opposition but nor were those who were meant to quell opposition always culturally prepared to deal with them as they would deal with men.

Traditional means of communication appear to have played important roles. "Heated discussions took place in village squares, at the wells, in the cooperative shops and at the

market,"<sup>54</sup> all the normal meeting places where peasant women would meet and exchange news and views and keep abreast of local events. To be equipped with as much knowledge as possible about what had been happening and the issues at stake and to have the opportunity to discuss possible strategies against unwelcome events proved as useful for the peasant women as for any group of people setting out to resist policies to which they object.

Nevertheless, successes seem to have been small, sporadic, and short-term, and pale against the overriding trend. Although there were common forms of resistance such as foot-dragging, "failure to understand instructions," and refusal to take initiative, these appear to have eventually given way to passive and active accommodation, suggesting resignation.<sup>55</sup> Resistance appears to have worked best when it was thought through and had some achievable goal, as in re-securing confiscated grain and equipment. By comparison, simply killing off livestock and breaking implements appears to have been ineffective and, with its contribution to the horrific famine that ensued, seems to have added to the tragedy that was forced collectivization.

One of the problems was that, though the brutality was widespread, Ukrainians had little in common with Kazakhs (other than their obvious victimization), some peasants may have happily joined in the campaign against the kulaks while others did not, and generally there were divisions and confusion. As well as there being a lack of the necessary solidarity, access to information seemed relatively poor in this case. Both these factors — solidarity and access to relevant information — stand out as momentous advantages in nonviolent resistance,

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51 Viola, "Bab'i bunt and peasant women's protest during collectivization," p. 227.

52 Not that the cadres alone were in charge of enforcing collectivization. According to Service, *A History of Twentieth Century Russia*, p. 180, men from the factories, militia, and the Party were called to venture into the villages to enforce collectivization. They were given neither limits on the use of violence nor detailed instructions on how to distinguish the rich, middling, and poor peasants from each other.

53 Viola, "Bab'i bunt and peasant women's protest during collectivization," pp. 224–225.

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54 Viola, "Bab'i bunt and peasant women's protest during collectivization," p. 217.

55 Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 5–10.

## The Stalin Terror

There can be little doubt that “the Terror” unleashed by Stalin in the mid 1930s was the most vicious and all-encompassing of all the periods of repression faced in the Soviet Union.<sup>56</sup> Between 1935 and 1941 more than 19 million people were arrested, seven million of them shot and the remainder sent to the Gulag (the term used for a state of exile, which could take place in numerous areas, most of them bitterly inhospitable), where many of them died.<sup>57</sup> Following World War II and up until the time of Stalin’s death in 1953, there was another wave of mass arrests, directed often at Jews.

The years of terror under Stalin were, in many ways, an intensification and expansion of what he had done to the peasants in his efforts to collectivize agriculture. The expansion of terror was extraordinary in that it targeted highly placed party and government officials as well as ordinary people. Indeed, so many bureaucrats were liquidated during the terror that the period was noted for high social mobility, as those killed left gaps into which others could move, creating career opportunities. This is one of the reasons that many people did not want to acknowledge “the Terror” or their own tenuous positions.

As well as shootings — often of highly placed officials — and the running of “show trials” involving those who had been in the forefront of the Revolution, there were massive intakes into labor camps of people across all different social strata. Stalin’s secret police — the NKVD, a forerunner to the KGB — unleashed and directed a campaign of severe

repression and terror.<sup>58</sup> While most of those in the upper echelons, including the Politburo and the Central Committee, survived, members of the Sovnarcum (the Council of People’s Commissars) were decimated, as were the upper ranks of the army. During the Great Purge of 1937–38, two-thirds of the army’s marshals, corps, and division commanders were arrested.<sup>59</sup>

In the republics, many party and state leaders disappeared, as did many managers of the economy. Diplomats or anyone who had contact with the West, whether through friends, colleagues, or relatives, were immediately under suspicion on that premise alone.<sup>60</sup> Among the officials shot or sent to Siberia, for instance, was the Foreign Ministry’s head of protocol who was under suspicion for “connections with foreigners” which was, of course, his job.<sup>61</sup> In the lower classes, as in the upper strata, people were cajoled to spy on one another and inform on the slightest suggestion of ideological non-conformity or aberration. One woman who dreamt that she had sexual relations with the Commissar of Defense was taken to a labor camp after mentioning the dream to a friend who reported her to the NKVD.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: Stalin’s Purge of the Thirties* (London: Macmillan, 1968); Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *The Permanent Purge: Politics in Soviet Totalitarianism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956).

<sup>57</sup> Adam Hochschild, *The Unquiet Ghost: Russians Remember Stalin* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1994), p. xi.

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<sup>58</sup> NKVD was the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs, which combined the secret police and interior commissariat. Ironically, it was modeled partly in the secret police of Ivan the Terrible. A full description of its role in the Terror can be found in Robert Conquest, *Inside Stalin’s Secret Police: NKVD Politics, 1936–39* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985).

<sup>59</sup> Mark Galeotti, *Gorbachev and his Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 1997), p. 8.

<sup>60</sup> Meanwhile, diplomats from other countries were often cautious not to mix with local people for fear that they might be “responsible for an innocent Russian’s death or exile”: Harold Eeman, *Inside Stalin’s Russia: Memories of a Diplomat 1936–1941* (London: Triton, 1977), p. 45.

<sup>61</sup> Hochschild, *The Unquiet Ghost*, p. 110.

<sup>62</sup> Andrei Sinyavsky, *Soviet Civilization: A Cultural History* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1988), p. 90.

Under such conditions of terror, within a culture where all people were encouraged to inform and where there was great adulation of Stalin, organizing any form of open resistance was something akin to suicide. Opponents were picked off and shot — along with a great many others who were not even opponents — before any significant level of organization could be accomplished. Even opposition to the Terror inside the Party is difficult to piece together since Stalin operated with tight secrecy and few were willing to risk breaking ranks from the silence. At the 17th Party Congress in 1934, before Stalin's repression moved onto its most bloodthirsty phase, there was a push for relaxation of both economic development and of party discipline, though the stenographic reports of this secret congress were not published. Opposition to Stalin's excesses had its center in the Party in Lenin-grad, with Sergei Kirov emerging as the leader of this more liberal faction. At the congress it was proposed that Stalin be stripped of his General Secretary status and given a less embracing role, with Kirov taking up Stalin's other duties. Stalin no doubt perceived this as a slight.

In December 1934, Kirov was assassinated, a killing that was generally thought to have been on Stalin's orders, though recently released documents suggest otherwise. In any case, this eliminated the person whom Stalin feared as a possible rival. Subsequently, Stalin used Kirov's death to step up the terror and to launch a ferocious political campaign against his enemies.

With such ruthless determination to eradicate all opposition, even within the upper echelons, it is apparent how difficult it would have been for ordinary Soviet citizens to organize full-scale and effective resistance. Citizens could be taken for interrogation anywhere or at any time. There were secret, unmarked doors in train stations and other places and people recall that by-standers would look the other way if someone was taken through one of these doors.<sup>63</sup> Sometimes interrogators gave assistance to those they

were interrogating and were themselves dragged off to labor camps.

Yet we know that there were at least some activists who took the grave risks involved. Suzanna Pechuro was part of a group of six teenagers who, unlike so many others who were arrested, were actually involved in strategies against Stalin. Pechuro makes light of what the group did: "What did we manage to do? Practically nothing. We issued two leaflets. We developed a program."<sup>64</sup> Such actions were brave in the context of what was happening in the Soviet Union at that time. The group refused to continue participating in a literary group where they were not allowed to read out poems unless the director had first checked them. Instead the teenagers formed their own group, setting themselves assignments to read, making synopses, and meeting to discuss their findings and views. Though they had to be extremely careful, they would also raise issues with other friends. Pechuro notes that, although the period is known as a time of mass betrayals and cowardice, none of her group was ever betrayed by their friends.

The group realized that, if each person spoke to others about what they knew and what they had learned and those in turn told other trusted friends, then a process of questioning would be underway. "Our task was to get the process going," Pechuro has explained. She claimed group members knew it was imperative that they not be intimidated, even though each of them knew the risks involved.<sup>65</sup> The group of six was eventually arrested and charged with plotting against Stalin, as were eleven of their friends who were under suspicion by virtue of their friendships. Of the six, three were shot and the others sent to labor camps. In the labor camps, Pechuro had the chance to resist in smaller and different ways. Her fellow prisoners taught her a number of strategies for survival and for communication, involving tapping on the wall

63 Hochschild, *The Unquiet Ghost*, p. 129.

64 Hochschild, *The Unquiet Ghost*, p. 31.

65 Hochschild, *The Unquiet Ghost*, p. 32.

to the next cell, using a code to spread messages to other prisoners.<sup>66</sup>

Clearly the obstacles faced by resisters under Stalin's reign of terror had much more to do with betrayal, fear, and trauma than with the actual technology of communication. Nevertheless it is interesting to see that Pechuro's group of resisters made a hectograph, a primitive printing machine, a description of which they found in the memoirs of a nineteenth-century revolutionary. With this they were able to print 250 copies of anything needing to be circulated, although 250 copies may arguably have been an optimistic number to have circulated in those days of mass informing and NKVD terror.

Some of the resistance to Stalin took the form of just trying to escape being arrested and thus avoid falling victim to his pogrom, though this is obviously not a strategy that initially involved actively confronting the regime. One couple developed a special way of ringing the doorbell, so as to ensure the other that it was not the NKVD coming to take them away.<sup>67</sup> A few others who thought that the NKVD might come for them changed their names and kept on the move. This could be quite successful, especially since it has been noted that the forte of the organization was inspiring terror and it was often quite poor at detective work.<sup>68</sup>

These conditions were among the most difficult for nonviolent activists. Not only was arrest and execution a constant threat — and the continual disappearance of so many was a reminder of this — but the culture of Stalinism would have made resistance seem as futile as it was dangerous.

The very symptoms fed into the structures which made it so difficult to oppose or even question dominant views. Stalinism was a cult inspired by massive propaganda and a state-promoted image of Stalin as loving, all-wise, and deserving of his power. The leader was deified, with believers suppressing normal

critical judgments and even intuitions. Censorship and state control went hand in hand with the mass arrests. If ever there was a strong case for carefully planned and orchestrated pressure from outside of the country, this would seem to be such a case. The part played internationally will be discussed later.

### **Relaxation born of resistance**

Although Stalin died in 1953, there was no automatic release of political prisoners from the labor camps. On the contrary, there were slow and tedious re-evaluations of prisoners, with many questions asked, many details taken, and a bureaucratic process undertaken to decide whether each particular prisoner might have been arrested and exiled "mistakenly." One survivor of the camps explained that, had all the political prisoners been declared innocent, "... it would be clear that the country was not being run by a legal government, but by a group of gangsters — which, in point of fact we were."<sup>69</sup> However, there were also economic reasons for the continuation of the camps which had been set up in the 1920s and greatly expanded under the reign of Stalin. He had used this cheap and involuntary labor for projects such as railway and canal building, tree felling, and mineral extraction. Some of the most inhospitable areas of the Soviet Union were rich in minerals, including uranium which posed another threat to the inmates of the labor camps, some of whom suffered severe radiation exposure.

The period following Stalin's death, with its ongoing repression for masses of political prisoners in camps, brought strong resistance. At first, news that the dictator was dead was kept from the prisoners, but it eventually trickled through. There were rebellions involving thousands of people in some of the largest camps.<sup>70</sup> In Kengir prisoners took over

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66 Hochschild, *The Unquiet Ghost*, p. 36.

67 Hochschild, *The Unquiet Ghost*, p. 96.

68 Hochschild, *The Unquiet Ghost*, p. 276.

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69 Hochschild, *The Unquiet Ghost*, p. 223.

70 A brief account of the strike is found in Michail Baitalsky, "Rebellion in the Northern Camps," in Stephen F. Cohen (ed.), *An End to Silence*:

the camp complex for 40 days, setting up their own newspaper and theatre. News of these rebellions reached other camps via such methods as desperate messages chalked on the inside walls of freight cars by inmates in other camps who had loaded or unloaded them. The methods of Stalinism were still in force. In Kengir women rebels were driven from their barracks and ridden over by Red Army tanks, with 700 prisoners killed. In Norilsk the camps were bombed and in Vorkuta the inmates were shot, en masse.<sup>71</sup>

On paper the rebellions looked like failures but one inmate of one of the camps that was involved in the strike at Vorkuta throws a different light on this. Joseph Scholmer, a German prisoner in Vorkuta Camp 6, claims that the strike “destroyed the myth that the system was unassailable.” He points out that the strike enjoyed the support of the 10,000 prisoners directly involved and much of the civilian population who quickly learned of the strike. Scholmer claims that most of the soldiers were sympathetic, as were the local peasantry.<sup>72</sup>

The Vorkuta strike lasted for several weeks, with organizing committees being set up and pamphlets and slogans used to achieve the fairly modest demands of the activists. Scholmer claims the strike could not have been possible without the prior existence of underground resistance groups. Nevertheless, there was little direct experience the strikers could call on, a factor which he claims led to its demise. As soon as the strike was over, the resistance groups began analyzing their actions, seeking to understand what might have been done better. It was felt that a better and more effective campaign might have been run from inside the pit, “the exclusive preserve of the prisoners.” Instead the prisoners were in the camps where the NKVD were able to “sort out, isolate and remove the most active elements in the strike.” In any case, Scholmer

notes that the strikers were generally dealt with much less harshly than many of them expected, though this is clearly relative. Having already endured a great deal, many had grave anticipations about their fate. One of the important factors in their having some negotiating power was that these Vorkuta prisoners were a crucial cog in the Soviet economy, providing much of the energy requirements for Leningrad, which was quickly plunged into a power shortage during the strike.

One reason that the strikes should not be considered failures is that from them sprang Khrushchev’s relaxation which in turn gave rise to the Soviet dissident movement. This movement is usually dated from 1956 when Khrushchev read his speech to the Twentieth Party Congress condemning the cult of Stalin and acknowledging, to at least some extent, that there had been terror.<sup>73</sup> However, at least one inmate from the camps at the time of the rebellions believes that Khrushchev’s relaxation was directly related to the resisters’ refusal to cooperate. She explains:

All the 1956 reforms and the shutting down of the camps were caused by those rebellions! It was no longer possible to keep this army of people in obedience. When the camps rebelled, coal-mining output dropped, timber-cutting also. Nobody was at work. Gold and uranium — no one was working. Something had to be done. Nikita Khrushchev released us. What else could he do? *We managed to make them release us.*<sup>74</sup>

In this way the dissidence should be perceived as ongoing, although certainly going through different phases and taking different forms. Also from the time of Khrushchev’s speech dissent grew among a new sector of people, who had not been in the camps, particularly intellectuals. The speech gave the impetus around which people could express

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*Uncensored Opinion in the Soviet Union* (New York: Norton, 1982), pp. 98–100.

71 Hochschild, *The Unquiet Ghost*, pp. 38–39.

72 Scholmer, *Vorkuta*, pp. 234–269.

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73 Sinyavsky, *Soviet Civilization*, pp. 227–28.

74 Susanna Pechuro, cited in Hochschild, *The Unquiet Ghost*, p. 39.

their disgust but it was also a point of conflict because the party was not taking any of the blame that dissidents felt it should.<sup>75</sup> The loosening of repression gave rise to networks of people, *kompanii*, who would gather regularly to socialize and discuss issues. These were the breeding grounds for *inakomslayashchie*, as dissidents were known, though the Russian word has a meaning not precisely the same as dissident.

Dissident Ludmilla Alexeyeva claimed that it was these *kompanii* which in turn gave rise to samizdat. In the mid-1950s a poet folded blank sheets of paper and typed poems on all four sides, then sewed the pages together as in a booklet and wrote *samsebya-izdat*, an acronym for “I published myself” on the front. This was a parody of *gozpolitizdat*, the name of an official publishing house in the USSR.<sup>76</sup> The practice became popular not just in the Soviet Union but throughout the Eastern bloc and the name became shortened to samizdat. Samizdat was used to publish first poetry and memoirs, particularly of those who had been in labor camps for political reasons, but later it was used for translations and for circulating banned writings, petitions, and various documents.<sup>77</sup> Using the humble typewriter, carbon paper, and very thin paper, dissidents would type up as many copies as would be legible. These would be circulated to others who often would themselves type multiple copies and distribute these.

Accompanying his censure of Stalin, Khrushchev took a more flexible stance on literature, urging writers not to “bother the government” but to decide among themselves the worth of their peers’ manuscripts. Of

course writers did not want to bother the government but previously they had had to submit their works to the government censor.<sup>78</sup> This change resulted in a flux of works critical of the Soviet Union being published overseas, including a number by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn whose *The Gulag Archipelago* described the conditions in some of the worst camps.<sup>79</sup>

Khrushchev, under pressures from conservatives, later retreated on some of these reforms. Criticism of Stalinism was curtailed and relations cooled between the leader and some of the dissenting artists and writers whom he had encouraged.<sup>80</sup>

### Consolidation of repression

Khrushchev was ousted in 1964. Under Leonid Brezhnev, who was president from then until 1982, there were serious moves away from liberalization and some signs of restalinization. This period was characterized by a tightening of censorship, introduction of new laws that put dissidents at greater risk, and harsher persecution of political and religious dissidents. Brezhnev also halted the rehabilitations of *Gulag* victims that Khrushchev had commenced. Under the new head of the KGB, Yuri Andropov, who was later to become leader, the KGB took on a more sophisticated approach to dissidents, which included many of them being locked up in psychiatric hospitals or even deported from the country.<sup>81</sup>

But the period of relaxation had allowed dissidents to grow more knowledgeable and to resolve that there would be no return to the past. The resistance that the new clamping down met was more mature and became better organized, especially around 1968, with several significant events. Sovietologist Peter Reddaway notes that about this time people

75 Donald Filtzer, *The Khrushchev Era: De-Stalinisation and the Limits of Reform in the USSR, 1953–1964* (London: Macmillan, 1993), p. 29.

76 Ludmilla Alexeyeva and Paul Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation: Coming of Age in the Post-Stalin Era* (Toronto: Little, Brown, 1990), pp. 97–98.

77 Alexeyeva and Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation*, pp. 97–99; Marshall S. Shatz, *Soviet Dissent in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 128.

78 McCauley, *The Soviet Union, 1917–1991*, p. 256.

79 Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918–1956* (London: Collins, 1975).

80 Filtzer, *The Khrushchev Era*, pp. 28–29.

81 Galeotti, *Gorbachev and his Revolution*, pp. 24–25.



dared to think and act independently of authorities.<sup>82</sup> This was a time when there was a significant protest and push for social change around the world and dissidents in the USSR no doubt took heart from this. Dissidents created formal and semi-formal associations and began to intercede on behalf of persecuted individuals and groups. They also formed networks to help dissidents in prison or in psychiatric hospitals and to assist their families.

On 25 August 1968 Pavel Litvinov led a small group of Soviet dissidents in a demonstration in Red Square against the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. One woman pushed a baby carriage and had two banners written on strips of cloth, one written in Czech and proclaiming "Long live free and independent Czechoslovakia!", the other "To your freedom and ours!"<sup>83</sup> Less than twenty minutes after their demonstration began and the banners were unfurled, the protesters were taken away by the KGB, put on trial, and sentenced to three years in prison camps. The next day an editorial of the *Literarni Listy* newspaper in Prague declared "Those seven people on Moscow's Red Square are at least seven reasons why we will never be able to hate the Russians."<sup>84</sup> The Czechoslovaks were not the only people to admire the bravery of the seven dissidents. According to Alexeyeva, members of the national liberation movements in the Ukraine and Baltic states spoke of their admiration "... when you go out protesting in the open, without weapons, just seven of you against the world, well, that takes a special brand of courage."<sup>85</sup>

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82 Peter Reddaway, "The development of dissent and opposition," in Archie Brown and Michael Kaser (eds.), *The Soviet Union Since the Fall of Khrushchev* (London: Macmillan, 1975), pp. 121–156, at p. 126.

83 Alexeyeva and Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation*, p. 219

84 Alexeyeva and Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation*, p. 220

85 Alexeyeva and Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation*, p. 222.

Another significant event occurred in 1968: the first publication of the *Chronicle of Current Events*, a samizdat journal committed to reporting on events relating to human or national rights. Editorial policy was to avoid value judgments and to keep readers abreast of new works being circulated in samizdat. It contributed hugely to systematically documenting human rights abuses in the Soviet Union and enjoyed considerable credibility both among those Soviet citizens who came into contact with it and among concerned groups overseas.

Samizdat as a method of communication may seem laborious and time-consuming compared with printing, mimeograph and, later, photocopying. However, it had some advantages in that it gave rise to particular forms of writing. Hungarian George Konrád noted that samizdat "is not an appropriate vehicle for lengthy analyses and descriptions; the samizdat cannot afford to be boring. ... Samizdat is a medium, and perhaps a genre as well. It is not cheap, it is relatively difficult to read, one cannot prattle, it has to be worth one's while."<sup>86</sup> The conciseness that was essential for samizdat, for the typists' benefit, also served the medium well in that writing which is to the point and does not waffle probably encourages a larger and more attentive readership, including readers who are very busy and who are unable to read through voluminous material. Samizdat works were widely circulated and discussed during the 1970s. Even some members of the bureaucracy and political leadership were among the readers. Arguably, this contributed strongly to glasnost,<sup>87</sup> which will be discussed later.

Slightly more sophisticated technologies further enabled dissidents to communicate news and views that would not have otherwise been given an airing. As cassette players became more available, they were used in a

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86 George Konrád, "Informing on ourselves," *The Nation*, Vol. 244, 28 February 1987, pp. 237–239.

87 Stuart Anderson, "Gorbie's choice: Perestroika's dissident roots," *The New Republic*, Vol. 200, No. 16, 17 April 1989, pp. 11–12.

samizdat fashion, with people making tapes, then making copies for others, who would then copy the cassettes in turn.<sup>88</sup> This allowed satirical songs and other protest music to also be circulated, known as magnitizdat. A huge demand for tape recorders grew in the Soviet Union during the 1960s and the state happily satisfied the demand, believing that the uses to which the technology was being put were more “innocent” than was the case.<sup>89</sup> Short-wave radios were hugely important and became very popular from 1968 when dissidents used them to listen to groups in Czechoslovakia and to hear about what demonstrations were taking place in the USSR.<sup>90</sup> Their popularity remained after the reformist period known as the Prague Spring had been squashed and contributed to the dissent that demanded and brought the next period of relaxation.

As well as sending information to the editors of the *Chronicle of Current Events*, dissidents similarly gave material to foreign journalists, tourists, and diplomats in the hope of spreading their cause and gathering support for their push for human rights. Reddaway claims that it was also about this time that Soviet citizens started to listen systematically to foreign radio stations and circulate information thus obtained and to propose to authorities carefully drafted proposals for law reform. Clearly these activities signaled a new level of activism. Dissidents were now being much more than victims. They were active protagonists of change.

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88 Shatz, *Soviet Dissent in Historical Perspective*, p. 129.

89 Gene Sosin, “Magnitizdat: uncensored songs of dissent” in Rudolf L. Tökes (ed.), *Dissent in the USSR: Politics, Ideology, and People* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), pp. 276–309, at p. 278.

90 Alexeyeva and Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation*, p. 222

## Glasnost

As mentioned, samizdat and the ideas of the dissidents played a crucial role in glasnost, introduced by President Gorbachev in the mid 1980s. Even the term glasnost was taken up by Gorbachev after being used by some dissidents as a key demand for a new sort of society. Indeed Gorbachev not only pushed ahead with many of the political and economic reforms that the dissidents had argued for, but he used remarkably similar terms and arguments, suggesting that he had been significantly influenced by them. A number of the ideas in a United Nations speech he made in December 1988, for instance, had appeared in dissident Andrei Sakharov’s 1968 samizdat work *Progress, Co-existence and Intellectual Freedom*.<sup>91</sup>

Under glasnost, Gorbachev not only allowed but encouraged a diversity of views. Not that repression died out under his leadership. There were several instances of disturbing state repression, much of it revolving around the increasingly vexed question of independence for the republics that had been under Russian rule for decades and sometimes centuries. Eighteen people died when commandos stormed first the Lithuanian TV center and then the headquarters of the Latvian Interior Ministry. Nor was the repression all the state’s doing. In some of the republics tensions arose and prejudices overwhelmed social relations so that national groups, impassioned by the nationality issue being on the agenda, fought each other, with loss of life and increasingly disharmonious relations.

Gorbachev also found that his encouragement to criticize was sometimes turned against him. In the May Day march of 1991 some placards demanded his resignation. The road to political freedom was not going to be smooth, nor did it enjoy wholehearted support. This became most obvious when the democratization process threatened to come to a halt with the 1991 coup. With one fell swoop, repression was restored.

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91 Anderson, “Gorbachev’s choice: Perestroika’s dissident roots,” p. 11.

## The role of international support for resistance

International support for Soviet resistance movements has not always been what it might have been. The period of most success was from 1968 and through the years of the Brezhnev era, when dissidents placed heavy reliance on international efforts to make the Soviet government abide by its human rights obligations. Much of the dissidents' energy was aimed at getting information to the West and hoping that that strategy would both put pressure on the Soviet government and also allow the information to come back into the country via short-wave radio and communications from foreigners. This appears to have worked well.

However, at other periods international support was minimal and sometimes even misdirected. The main problems seem to have been:

- Western foreign policy was linked less with concern for the people of the Soviet Union than with Western governments' own perceived political interests;
- there was a misplaced belief in militarism as the best form of diplomacy;
- both the right and left held to their own rigid ideologies;
- little reliable information came out of the USSR, a problem to which ideological supporters of the Soviet Union and foreign diplomats there themselves contributed.

The building of the Soviet system took place under extraordinary isolation. Internationally, there was a great deal of hostility towards the Bolshevik regime from the beginning. Several Western governments supplied money and guns to the counter-revolutionaries in the Civil War that ensued in 1918 to 1920.<sup>92</sup> This was despite workers in many of these countries, and particularly the UK, feeling strongly that the new Soviet regime should be given a chance to implement its programs. Allied troops were also sent: British troops landed in Archangel and

Murmansk in 1918; US, Serbian, and Italian troops were stationed in the north; US, British, Japanese, and Czech troops were in Siberia; British troops were in the Caucasus; and French troops were in the Crimea. Although these troops seldom engaged in direct battle against the Reds,<sup>93</sup> their very presence and the postures of hostility by their home governments set the stage for an acrimonious relationship. Thus, as historian McCauley notes, "The Bolshevik regime was fashioned by the exigencies of Civil War."<sup>94</sup> The party's internal disagreements about freedoms and open dissent tended to be set aside as the more pressing question of survival took precedence. This was in contrast to the early days of the Revolution, when there was popular participation, workers' control, and considerably greater tolerance for disagreement.

Although the Red Army had been set up in keeping with the spirit of the revolution, the hostility directed towards the Soviet Union from outside drove the army towards a different model. In 1917 there had been soviets of soldiers and a move away from the rigid hierarchies of the Czarist army, but this was reversed as Trotsky took control and reorganized the army along more traditional hierarchical lines. Tens of thousands of former Czarist officers were put into positions of command. This effectively brought about a militarization of the revolution, which in turn impacted on the society which was emerging in the newly formed Union. The conventionally organized army could be used to repress challenges to the increasingly centralized Bolshevik rule.

As further crises arose, important questions of liberty and open criticism were habitually put on the backburner so that, in the years between 1926 and 1929 especially, Stalin was able to amass more power than many in the party wanted him to have. Lenin had earlier warned of this power accruing to Stalin but the hostility from outside worked against it being addressed.

92 Service, *A History of Twentieth Century Russia*, p. 117.

93 McCauley, *The Soviet Union, 1917–1991*, p. 28.

94 McCauley, *The Soviet Union, 1917–1991*, p. 30.

Ironically, the disastrous agricultural policy of the USSR during the 1920s and early 1930s was related in no small way to attempts by foreign governments to crush the Soviet Union. By supporting the counter-revolutionaries and cutting off access to many raw materials, intervening governments gave the Soviet leaders cause to feel under siege. There was a fear that the West would attack. The only answer was seen to be rapid industrialization, at which point increasing pressure was put on the peasantry, as discussed earlier.

Hostilities against the Soviet Union took many forms and surfaced numerous times. Such was the strength of the suspicion and hostility that in the build-up to World War II the British government saw the Soviet Union as a larger threat than fascism. Some even felt that fascism had some benefits in that it might be able to squash Communism.<sup>95</sup>

Following initial military intervention in the Soviet Union in the early days, there were further encounters of a militaristic nature, with the result invariably being that the Soviet government would strengthen its own military capabilities. This was particularly the case in the earlier years of the Cold War and also of the period in the 1980s when US President Ronald Reagan engaged in constant aggressive posturing, as well as “upping the nuclear ante.” Of course, during both the 1950s and 1980s the US government itself used the increased militarization of the Soviet Union to justify its own increased expenditures on weaponry and on the military sector generally. Each military escalation would justify the other’s paranoia about its objectives, thereby plunging each into a spiral of increased risk of war. While both the East and West paid dramatically in terms of loss of social welfare and other more useful programs to which the expenditure could have been redirected, the Soviet Union, with its constantly troubled economy, arguably paid a greater price with little left over for much needed social im-

provements. This gradually resulted in loss of popular support for the Soviet government.

We should not assume, however, that it is only governments that can influence outcomes in other countries. The international movement against apartheid, in response to the actions and requests of the people of South Africa, shows otherwise. Groups of activists and individuals, especially if they are well-known and enjoy notoriety, can have a significant impact on swaying public opinion or in boosting the morale of those facing problems in their home countries. Unfortunately, people in such a position, for the most part, failed badly in regard to what they might have done in respect to repression in the Soviet Union, particularly during the years of Stalin’s rule.

Many writers, social commentators and others who had an interest in international politics and who were of a left persuasion, chose to believe that Stalin was something akin to the god-like figure painted of him in the USSR. They had a view of how they wanted the Soviet Union to be and they preferred to make their beliefs fit the ideal rather than to see the country for what it was. This included a great many people who traveled to the Soviet Union during some of its most repressive and disruptive years and yet saw only what they were allowed to see, what they were told by those who organized their visits, and what they wanted to believe. David Caute has written of many of these “fellow travellers” as having had “commitment *at a distance*,” the distance being not only geographical but emotional and intellectual.<sup>96</sup> The Soviet Union, during its darkest years, made good use of such people, pointing out that their objectivity was beyond question since they usually belonged to no political party, or at least not the Communist Party.<sup>97</sup>

But, as Adam Hochschild points out, the split between those who saw clearly and those who chose to deny did not always lie along

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95 D. F. Fleming, *The Cold War and Its Origins, 1917–1960, Vol. 1*, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1961).

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96 David Caute, *The Fellow-Travellers: A Postscript to the Enlightenment* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), p. 3.

97 Caute, *The Fellow-Travellers*, p. 7.

ideological lines. He identifies two of the worst deniers as being major US establishment figures. *New York Times* correspondent Walter Duranty and US ambassador Joseph Davies each sent home messages from the Soviet Union that all was well there. Acknowledging that there had at least been some sort of purging, they both agreed that this had been necessary and served the country well by cleansing it and ridding it of treason. Moreover, these men were not tourists. They lived in Russia and must have had more first hand knowledge than some who simply flitted through the country, being shown what was deemed that they should see.<sup>98</sup>

Others who chose to overlook the situation in the Soviet Union during its terrors of forced collectivization and the Great Purge were believers in the ideal of communism. They wished to see the Soviet Union as a country moving forward with the blessing of all its citizens. The reality was so far different from their constructed view that they chose to ignore it. Some of these had good reason to know about the reality, whereas others may have had less understanding of the situation. Many reports about the Soviet Union were presented from an anti-communist perspective, giving supporters of the Soviet government some reason — though not necessarily sufficient reason — to doubt what they heard. Others chose not to know.

Directly after the Second World War, when the Soviet government geared up for a new wave of terror, similar to that unleashed in the late 1930s, there was much ill feeling in the Western world about socialism and those who wished to defend it in principle felt that, in the polarized ideological environment, they must defend it also in practice, no matter what warped practices came from socialist states. Among the pro-Soviet left in the West, there was little honest and free discussion and apparently no strategy to promote greater freedom in the Soviet Union.

There were, in essence, two polarized blocs in the West, one saying that there could be nothing good about the Soviet Union and

the other that there could be nothing bad about it. This polarization stifled any possible understanding of the real situation there. It also fed into the Cold War and the military build-up both in the Soviet Bloc and elsewhere. If we speak of relatively low levels of action in opposition to repression in the Soviet Union, then part of the responsibility lies with Western governments and the Western left.

Only during the Brezhnev years, as mentioned, did the West prove useful to Soviet dissidents and even then it was often the enemies of socialism who took up the cause while left wingers preferred to close their eyes to Soviet repression or at least insist that it was a low priority on the scale of global oppression. The role of the West faded somewhat under glasnost as the nation was liberalized, although US leaders often liked to think that the liberalization was due to the history of Western belligerence rather than despite it.

## Conclusion

The Soviet people may have been their own savior in the defeat of the 1991 coup but repressed people around the world request, expect, and deserve assistance in their struggles. The end to apartheid came because of the struggle of the South African majority but, arguably, it came more quickly due to the solidarity shown on the international stage — and probably would have come more quickly again had that support been greater earlier. Solidarity strikes us as being one of the major factors in social struggles.

Glancing back at the different periods of Soviet repression, we can glean that networks, where and when they existed, were particularly useful, and that actions with well thought through goals had the best chance of success. If one ingredient for resistance was missing more than any other during the Stalinist Terror, it was networks of resistance. The NKVD had formed a massive and powerful apparatus of repression, while individuals lived in either fear or denial, both seriously isolating frames of mind. Often family members dared not speak among themselves of their concerns, for fear that children might

98 Hochschild, *The Unquiet Ghost*, p. 271.

report them to their teachers or unwittingly repeat something said at the dinner table. Both networks and open communications had obviously broken down at their most fundamental level.

Networks of dissidents, the *kompanii* founded in the 1950s, were among the most important developments in the Soviet dissident movement. From them grew widespread samizdat, international pressure for human rights, and an imposing dissident literature that laid the foundation for glasnost. Glasnost itself played an important role in providing psychological preparation for resisting the coup.

Another lesson comes from dissident Vladimir Bukovsky who recommends using systems against themselves. Pointing out the extremely bureaucratic nature of the Soviet system, he has described how even those in Soviet prisons could turn the system against itself. He and his fellow prisoners nearly brought their prison to a standstill with an avalanche of complaints which, under Soviet law, they were entitled to make. Because of the highly bureaucratized rules and rituals surrounding the receipt of complaints and dealing with them, this caused huge problems.<sup>99</sup> The message is to know each system and its weaknesses and to think creatively about how these might be utilized towards one's goals.

Nonviolent goals should always involve nonviolent means to their achievement. It is telling that, during the 1991 Soviet coup, the three deaths of protesters in Moscow were at a venue where Molotov cocktails (home-made explosives) had been thrown. For even just a few people to use violence can create fear and confusion and hinder the winning over of guards, soldiers, or other potential oppressors.

But perhaps the greatest lesson is about the nature of social struggle. Both 1917 and 1991 can be seen as successes for nonviolent action. Yet they remind us that, following social change brought about by mass actions (whether violent or nonviolent) major chal-

lenges can lie ahead. Social struggle is clearly an ongoing process. Citizens of the ex-Soviet Union are today trying to come to grips with a society with very different sorts of problems. They can be both proud of their 1991 achievement and bewildered that they must start afresh, finding new ways of having a voice.

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99 Vladimir Bukovsky, *To Build a Castle — My Life as a Dissenter* (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1978), pp. 35–39.

## Resisting global corporate domination

The defeat of the proposed Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) in October 1998 stands out as a striking example of successful nonviolent action, one in which global resistance and democratic networking truly worked. The success can be attributed largely to commitment and effective campaigning techniques, in which communication and good use of communication technology were important factors, with activists using the Internet to alert each other initially of the proposed treaty and later of key developments as they occurred.

In marked contrast, there appears to have been less effective resistance in a number of other cases where global institutions have promoted policies that have harmed the world's most disadvantaged people. While there certainly has been resistance to such policies, until the 1990s it has not generally been effectively coordinated on a global scale.

Starting with a discussion of the draft MAI and why it triggered such widespread concerns, this chapter explores how the campaign against the MAI toppled the proposed treaty, what insights can be gleaned from the campaign and how the push for the treaty was part of a broader corporate goal, with its seeds at Bretton Woods and in institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which long preceded the MAI. We then pose some questions as to why a momentum like that against the MAI did not build up significantly and until more recently around other comparable issues such as structural adjustment and the eventual formation of the World Trade Organization (WTO). There had been widespread critiques but relatively little coordinated action until events in Seattle in November-December 1999. This was despite grave consequences surrounding these measures.

### The MAI and its likely impacts

For at least several decades there has been a concerted push on the part of multinational corporations to liberalize trade. Some of the trends that formed part of that general thrust towards liberalization included structural adjustment as demanded by the IMF; the direction taken by the European Economic Community's Internal Market in the 1980s; and the setting up of the WTO in 1995.<sup>1</sup> The establishment of an MAI was meant to be a major platform — if not the final destination — on the road to trade liberalization. Its grandiosity can be gleaned from the boast by Renato Ruggiero, Director-General of the WTO, that “We are writing the constitution of a single global economy.”<sup>2</sup>

In 1995 the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) announced the decision to draft an MAI, with the purpose of achieving “liberalization of investment regimes and investment protection, with effective dispute-settlement procedures.”<sup>3</sup> The treaty was meant to complement other bodies already in existence such as the IMF and the WTO. The latter had been recently established to oversee global trade in goods, services, and intellectual property rights by

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1 Colin Hines, “Invisible hand of the ERT,” *Ecologist*, Vol. 27, No. 6, November/December 1997, pp. 249–251.

2 Renate Ruggiero, Director-General of the World Trade Organization, speech to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), 8 October 1996.

3 OECD, “Mandate for MAI negotiations,” press release, Paris, May 1995, quoted in James Goodman and Patricia Randal (eds.), *Stopping the Juggernaut: Public Interest Versus the Multilateral Agreement on Investment* (Sydney: Pluto, 1999), p. ix.

setting rules for foreign direct investment.<sup>4</sup> The MAI, for its part, was being designed to increase the mobility of all forms of investment and financial transactions, including direct investment, portfolio investment, loans, bonds, and other forms of international finance.<sup>5</sup>

The effect of such a treaty would have been to tie governments' hands in enacting legislation in a vast range of areas that might impinge on transnational investment. Although there were some areas of "exception" that could be nominated by governments, the aim was to eventually eliminate and roll back these "non-conforming measures," as the exceptions were to be called. Moreover, the exceptions had to be listed up-front, with standstill clauses making no provision for later introducing any additional exceptions. Governments would have been prevented from regulating with regard to environmental, employment, consumer, and other issues where multinational corporations (MNCs) deemed that such regulations interfered with their freedom to compete in the marketplace.

In an attempt to remove all barriers to free flow of capital, the agreement would have forced signatory countries to treat foreign competitors and investors as the equals of national companies and investors. Of course, these are not equals as MNCs already enjoy enormous privileges and power that give them a huge advantage over small local competitors. Yet under the MAI any legislation that favored local investment, restricted foreign investment, or required foreign investors to contribute to local development could be regarded as discriminatory. Under clauses relating to "investment protection" and "expropriation," transnational investors could not have been

"impaired" from "operation, management, use, enjoyment or disposal of investments by unreasonable or discriminatory measures."<sup>6</sup> These clauses alarmed critics of the draft agreement due to their breadth, ambiguity, and terminology.<sup>7</sup>

The implementation of such an agreement would have had far-reaching implications for social welfare, the arts, research, non-profit organizations, and much more. It would have jeopardized governments' ability to maintain some control over matters such as local investment, technology transfer, training, and export requirements. The draft limited many aspects of industry policy, regional development, and government procurement policy, so that governments could not, for instance, require corporations to have joint ventures with local investors or to have specified levels of local ownership.<sup>8</sup> Nor could they insist that local people be trained or that research and development be undertaken locally. Laws limiting foreign ownership in vital services or setting minimum national content in film and television would also have been seen as discriminatory, as would assistance given to local television and film industries.

Socialist or green governments, if coming to office in countries that had signed the agreement, would have found it impossible to live up to their names, since the agreement sought to reformulate states and give them new roles, so that they would simply become de facto servants of MNCs, able to act only in the interests of global capital. Of course, many governments do this already. The MAI would ensure that they did.

As an exercise in working towards equalizing the investment conditions faced by MNCs across the globe, the MAI would have been likely to bring about a "lowest common denominator" or "race to the bottom" in the areas of environmental, consumer, and labor

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4 David Wood, "The international campaign against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment: a test case for the future of globalization?," *Ethics, Place and Environment*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2000, pp. 25-45.

5 Patricia Ranald, "Disciplining governments: the MAI in the international and Australian contexts," in Goodman and Ranald, *Stopping the Juggernaut*, pp. 15-32, at p. 17.

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6 OECD, Multilateral Agreement on Investment: The MAI Negotiating Text, as of 24 April, 1998, OECD, Paris, p. 57, article IV.

7 Ranald, "Disciplining governments," p. 17.

8 Ranald, "Disciplining governments," p. 23.



laws. While the proposal spelt out more certainty for investors, it held much more uncertainty for workers and for the poor in general. Indeed, the poor would have been among the worst affected. To cite just one example, the MAI would put a question mark over much assistance to the poor such as subsidized food, which is an imperative in many poorer countries.

Because the draft MAI made no mention of equity provisions based on gender, ethnicity, or race, anti-discrimination or affirmative action legislation could have been challenged under the investment protection provisions. Hard-earned legislation could have been effectively erased with the stroke of a pen. A similar situation existed with indigenous rights laws and, because in many cases indigenous peoples are still struggling for legislation to ensure their rights, positive outcomes to those struggles would have been thwarted.

The production of arms was one of the few areas singled out for exemptions from the MAI. Critics feared that research and development funding for economically and socially productive research would be funneled into military and weapons development. Meanwhile, the sorts of trade sanctions that contributed to ending apartheid in South Africa would have been illegal under the MAI.<sup>9</sup>

Once they were signatories to the treaty, countries would have been bound by its terms for at least 20 years. Furthermore, the proposed agreement had provisions for MNCs to sue governments. Corporations could challenge laws that they felt were inconsistent with the MAI or they could sue governments for damages, for instance for "lost opportunity to profit from a planned investment." The complainant would also be given the right to nominate a tribunal of its choice to hear the case and could opt for a body as sympathetic to corporations as, for example, the Interna-

tional Chamber of Commerce.<sup>10</sup> The thrust of the legally binding document was certainly that MNCs' privileges would be vastly extended and the rights and jurisdictions of states correspondingly constrained in matters where there was seen to be conflict between the two. This assumption — that MNCs should be free from accountability to elected governments — was noted as the proposed agreement's most salient feature and was attacked by critics as undemocratic.<sup>11</sup>

Further highlighting its undemocratic nature, from 1995 the draft MAI was prepared with substantial secrecy by the OECD, which represents the 29 wealthiest countries. It was chiefly aimed at poor countries, with *The Economist* noting "The more significant barriers to foreign investment lie in developing countries."<sup>12</sup> Already deregulation and privatization had deepened the gulf between rich and poor both between and within countries. The MAI seemed destined to ensure more of the same.

Even from an economic point of view and within the framework of its own stated objectives, many critics pointed out that the proposed treaty was flawed. According to the Network of Women in Further Education, for instance, the MAI would have further entrenched the type of conditions under which multinational investors set up export production plants characterized by poor working conditions, dismally low wages, and few, if any, labor rights. However, on a macro-economic level, the trend towards these sorts of conditions, encouraged by treaties such as the MAI, does not comprise a viable strategy for economic development, the Network

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9 Steven Staples, "Militarism and MAI," *Earth Island Journal*, Vol. 14, issue 1, Winter-Spring 1999, p. 36.

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10 Paul Rauber, "All hail the multinationals!" *Sierra*, Vol. 83, No. 4, July-August 1998, pp. 16–17.

11 Ted Wheelwright, "Carte blanche for global corporations," *Arena*, No. 34, April-May 1998, pp. 38–40; John Pilger, "The rise of the 'new democracy'," *Ecologist*, Vol. 24, No. 4, July 1999, pp. 242–243.

12 Anon, "The sinking of the MAI," *Economist*, Vol. 346, 14 March 1998, pp. 81–82.

insisted. "Rather, it consistently frustrates local and national economic development objectives."<sup>13</sup>

Little wonder, then, that the draft treaty sent shivers down the spines of those who had struggled long and hard for social justice. It would not only have presented an impediment to the struggle by placing direct limits on new legislation sorely needed to ensure social justice, but it would have eroded much of what had been won and provided the very conditions for further social impoverishment and corporate enrichment. Many people thought this treaty should be opposed.

### **The campaign against the MAI**

The diversity of organizations that made submissions to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties in Australia demonstrates the range of concerns and the depth of feeling engendered by the proposed MAI. Nine hundred submissions were made to that inquiry, 95% opposing the MAI. The submissions included many from environmental groups, women's groups, Aboriginal groups, unions, aid agencies, and church organizations, as well as from the Public Interest Advocacy Centre, Amnesty International, the Australian Industry Group, and individuals, verifying the widespread nature of the opposition. This was fairly typical of the concerns expressed worldwide about the proposed treaty.

Unlike the OECD, which attempted to conduct its MAI negotiations in secret and as far removed from public scrutiny as possible, the campaign against the MAI was characterized by networking and a commitment to democratic principles. The campaign commenced in 1997 when a photocopy of the draft was leaked to Global Tradewatch, a citizens' organization in the US. Using the net, Global Tradewatch disseminated the information to numerous organizations, starting a chain reaction that would involve more than 600

groups around the world. The campaign was immediately underway.

Much of the initial impetus came from well-organized groups in Canada where citizens had already had a taste of life under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). This investment agreement was similar in many respects to the proposed MAI, with the aim of eliminating export performance conditions, requirements pertaining to hiring certain numbers of local residents and purchasing inputs locally, and other perceived barriers to investment. Both treaties were designed in the same spirit of shifting towards decreased obligations and increased rights for MNCs. Both had very similar ramifications across a range of areas, for example the environment, where the Environmental Defender's Office in Australia noted that both NAFTA and MAI offered gravely deficient environmental protection.<sup>14</sup>

The case of a dispute between the Canadian government and a US multinational corporation, Ethyl Corporation, highlights this point. Due to serious health and air pollution concerns regarding MMT — a controversial manganese fuel additive — the Canadian government banned the importation and inter-provincial transport of this substance. However, Ethyl, as the only North American manufacturer of MMT, claimed this to be discriminatory against its product and filed a claim under NAFTA against the Canadian government for \$250 million in damages. Ethyl claimed that Canada's regulations would effectively force it out of business. It wanted the Canadian government to formulate its environmental and health policies around Ethyl's business preferences rather than Ethyl having to meet the environmental standards applicable in the country to which it exported its product. The Canadian government, its sovereignty greatly diminished under the

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13 "Submission by Network of Women in Further Education to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties," reproduced in Goodman and Randal, *Stopping the Juggernaut*, pp. 152–158.

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14 "Submission by Environmental Defender's Office Ltd to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties," reproduced in Goodman and Randal, *Stopping the Juggernaut*, pp. 206–219.

treaty, lifted the ban and paid limited costs to Ethyl.<sup>15</sup>

Similar claims and demands could have been made through the MAI, which was to be more all-encompassing in terms of the areas covered and more global in that it would apply to all signatories, not just Canada, the US, and Mexico. Canadian activists quickly realized from the leaked draft that the MAI had even further scope than NAFTA for environmental and social damage, and threw themselves into the campaign accordingly.

Another country where there was particularly strong resistance was France, where film and television interests hotly opposed the MAI since it could have been used to dismantle special government support given to keep them viable against overseas cultural rivals. But such motivations for opposing the MAI were less prevalent than global justice concerns, even in France.<sup>16</sup> While other OECD governments were busily promoting the MAI, the French government was the only OECD member to reassess the MAI, no doubt taking note of popular disquiet. The French government commissioned a thorough report, which concluded that the agreement should be either transformed radically or cancelled entirely. When the French government withdrew from the OECD's MAI negotiations, stating that it would not be wise to "allow private interests to chew away at the sovereignty of states," this virtually signaled the death of the treaty, at least in that form.<sup>17</sup>

But in most cases, MAI opponents could not rely on governments. On the contrary, many governments and their bureaucracies seemed determined to push full steam ahead

with the MAI regardless of how much or what level of public dissent was evident. This is amply shown by the tactics of the very pro-MAI Australian Treasury Department. When the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF), a prominent environmental organization, filed a freedom-of-information request for information relating to the MAI from Treasury, it unwittingly embarked on a protracted bureaucratic process that would last 18 months and test its patience and resources to the limit.

The Treasury claimed first that its "limited resources" made the request, as it stood, impossible to meet. It asked the ACF to restrict its request to just one document plus some basic information already sent to the ACF. The ACF would not agree to such curtailment, though it did narrow its request. Nearly three months after its initial request and following numerous telephone calls, the ACF was told that the request was still being dealt with. By then Treasury had exceeded the time set by the Freedom of Information Act. A month later the ACF was able to contact a Treasury official who said that a letter was being drafted to refuse the ACF's request but that it might take a further two weeks. The ACF responded with a letter demanding a substantive response and setting a deadline to receive this. After the deadline's expiry, the ACF lodged an appeal with the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. Only then did Treasury release the requested documents — but only some of them. The dispute over the remaining documents was still ongoing in June 1999, when the MAI had already been buried.

Treasury's dealings with the ACF were characterized by delays, stalling, blustering, red tape, changing tack, ignoring phone calls and letters, claims of inability, cries of "too hard to do," and generally keeping opponents in the dark. These sorts of tactics obstruct and demoralize activists and waste enormous amounts of their time, energy, and resources. That is precisely the point of such tactics. Treasury would have known that time was of the essence, with the OECD looking to finalize the treaty in 1998.

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15 Wood, "The international campaign against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment."

16 Joe Taglieri, "Pressure from citizens' groups kills trade treaty for now," *National Catholic Reporter*, Vol. 35, No. 13, 29 January 1999, p. 4.

17 James Goodman, "Stopping a juggernaut: the anti-MAI campaign," in Goodman and Randal, *Stopping the Juggernaut*, pp. 33–52, at pp. 42–43; Anon, "Bye-bye to MAI?" *Macleans*, 26 October 1998, p. 51.

Treasury's dealings with the ACF also display arrogance and contempt for democratic processes. The Joint Standing Committee on Treaties — a parliamentary committee with members drawn from both houses of federal parliament — also criticized Treasury, claiming that it “seemed to believe that it owned this document [the MAI].” Referring to Treasury's “excessive zeal” for the MAI which, it noted, “can sometimes blind an organization,” the committee expressed concern that Treasury refused to accept the validity of the concern of those who opposed the Treaty.<sup>18</sup>

This suggests that defending state sovereignty against corporate domination certainly has its downside, leaving activists wondering why they would possibly want to protect the sovereignty of governments that clearly and frequently act against the interests of citizens and the environment, including when supporting local capitalist interests. Most social justice activists involved in the anti-MAI campaign would oppose both national and global oppression, but feel amply justified in targeting the MAI because it would undermine socially beneficial national legislation while doing little to reduce state-level oppression. Also, the MAI had serious implications even for local government. Activists have had some success in democratizing at least some local government bodies and would hope to continue to do so in the future.

Thus far we have seen who was involved in the campaign and why, but these alone do not make for effective campaigning. The issue of how campaigning took place in resisting the MAI is crucial.

### **The role of the Internet**

The net was central to the campaign. When activists discovered the OECD's secret negotiations, the draft MAI was quickly put on the World Wide Web, where it could be popularly accessed. Activists in Canada worked to synthesize and analyze the information

available on the MAI to make networking and lobbying easier and more efficient. However, there were numerous other ways in which e-mail and the web proved useful:

- *Getting information onto the web.* People could make use of this information in their own time, in their own way, at their own pace, and in accordance with their own abilities and concerns. Because information on the web is not linear but can be accessed in different ways, this can suit activists with their own focuses and philosophies. Canadian groups opposing the MAI were praised by activists elsewhere for their particularly useful and informative anti-MAI web sites, as well as for their commitment to the cause.

- *E-mailing other activists.* This was crucial, as the information on the web is only useful if people are alerted to its existence. E-mail is quick, relatively easy, and can handle multiple messages, allowing numerous warnings to be sent to other activists who then e-mailed other contacts or networked in other ways. This was done very rapidly so that a momentum built up; without e-mail, activists might not have been able to cope with the OECD's deadline for pushing through the MAI.

- *Countering secrecy.* Maude Barlow of the Council of Canadians said “If we know something that is sensitive to one government, we get it to our ally in that country instantly.” She claims that governments will never again be able to conduct such secret trade negotiations, explaining “If a negotiator says something to someone over a glass of wine, we'll have it on the Internet within an hour, all over the world.”<sup>19</sup>

- *Forcing governments' hand in regard to information.* Governments' elaborate communication resources often far exceed their willingness to involve citizens in decision making, as was seen with the ACF's dealings

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18 James Goodman, “Conclusion,” in Goodman and Ranald, *Stopping the Juggernaut*, pp. 221–228, at pp. 224–225.

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19 Madelaine Drohan, “How the net killed the MAI: grassroots groups used their own globalization to derail deal,” *Globe & Mail* (Toronto), 29 April 1998.

with Treasury. Nonetheless, Australian anti-MAI activists claimed that it was difficult for the federal government to maintain the levels of secrecy they desired once news of the MAI was spread. Activists were able to pressure the government to make relevant documents, such as transcripts of sittings of parliament and reports of the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, available on the web.

- *Lobbying.* Activists were able to instigate and deliver sign-on letters to the OECD and to obtain confirmation that they had been printed and delivered by hand to the chairperson. Being able to document meetings, phone calls, and conversations on the web also made it more difficult for politicians and bureaucrats to “fob off” activists.

- *Sharing.* There is much more shared over the net than data and information. Activists were able to document their particular experiences, establish credibility, and gain insights, as well as support each other.

- *Discussion and initiation of alternatives.* Many anti-MAI activists realized the weakness of campaigns that are primarily negative, so they used the net to broaden discussion, for example through discussion forums. The Polaris Institute and Citizens’ Public Trust, among others, developed websites addressing alternative proposals.

A newspaper article entitled “How the net killed the MAI” describes the extent to which the net was used successfully by MAI opponents.<sup>20</sup> That the article itself came to be widely circulated on the net suggests that its assessment resonated with activists.

The mass media, overall, were not an especially useful channel for activists, not being under popular control and displaying little interest in the issue. Although the alternative media covered the MAI, it was remarkably absent from the mainstream media. Indeed, Project Censored, a media watchdog organization that compiles annual lists of the most important stories in the US that received

inadequate news coverage, judged the push for the MAI as the most important under-reported story of 1998.<sup>21</sup>

It could almost be argued that the mass media’s neglect of the MAI allowed the campaign to stay much more focused on core issues. Mass media coverage sometimes can defuse or deflect campaigns by emphasizing side issues and turning a struggle into a spectator sport in which citizen activists are typecast as being on the fringe. Politicians and bureaucrats in Australia — and no doubt elsewhere — attempted to stereotype anti-MAI activists as “conspiracy theorists” advocating a cause not worthy of media attention.<sup>22</sup> Politicians and bureaucrats enjoy some special relations with journalists and editors who rely on their media releases and co-operation in order to assemble the news. The relationship, though having its complexities, has a substantial degree of symbiosis to it, something not present in the net.

Nevertheless, governments and corporations can also use the net, so it is not immediately apparent why the net should have proved more beneficial to anti-MAI campaigners. The reason is that the network form of the campaign meshed much better with the net — which, as its name indicates, is a network — than the bureaucratic structure of governments and corporations. In a bureaucracy, most official communication out of the organization is tightly controlled at the top. Uncontrolled lateral e-mail is a potential threat to the organizational hierarchy and often is discouraged in spite of rhetoric about flattened hierarchies, the network organization, and the like. Given that the MAI was being promoted in secrecy, leaks had the potential to undermine the operation. Therefore, employees could not be trusted to communicate without being overseen.

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21 Peter Phillips and Project Censored, *Censored 1999: The News That Didn’t Make the News — The Year’s Top 25 Censored Stories* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1999); <http://www.projectcensored.org/>.

22 Goodman, “Conclusion,” pp. 225–226.

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20 Drohan, “How the net killed the MAI.”

It was not simply the goals of the MAI lobbyists and anti-MAI campaigners that were opposite but the organizational structures within which each group was trying to achieve its goal. Anti-MAI campaigners, most of whom had commitments to democracy and equity, were attempting to disseminate information whereas those hoping to push through the agreement were using tactics of careful containment of information and lobbying of a very private nature. The bureaucratic structure of the governments and corporate proponents of the MAI meant that they could not obtain the full benefit of the swift lateral networking made possible by the net.

This suggests a lesson for global activists: avoid being bogged down in movement bureaucracies. If rapid, flexible, and innovative responses are needed to oppose the push for corporate globalization, this can best occur through ad hoc alliances of local groups and networks. To have a few peak organizations speaking for local groups can adversely affect response time, reduce flexibility, and increase risk of co-optation. On the other hand, peak organizations can play their part too. The ACF was able to pursue Treasury through formal administrative channels and obtain at least some of the desired documents where individuals and smaller groups may have failed.

Also, there are some disadvantages to using the net. Goodman claims that news-groups can become an irritating distraction and that there is a need for filtering. "International lists were moderated from the start, mainly with North American-based NGOs [nongovernment organizations] filtering the information."<sup>23</sup> There is, therefore, scope for some to claim that some level of censorship occurs. However, one of the ongoing problems with the net is that the huge amount of information and discussion can be extremely daunting, not to mention time-consuming. Most activists with limited amounts of time, which they hope to use as effectively as possible, would welcome filtering as part of the overall co-ordination efforts.

Goodman also points out that "internet campaigning, as opposed to internet co-ordination, is no substitute for paper-based dissemination; neither could the 'networked NGOs' afford to ignore the more formal party-political channels."<sup>24</sup> The Australian situation illustrates how campaigning and co-ordination worked together. One person in each state was given the task of coordinating a stop-MAI group. Contact names were circulated and a national campaign set up via e-mail. The Western Australian co-ordination was particularly active, initiating a national petition to the OECD. In such cases it is the spread of information via the petition, as a point of focus, and the publicity that are important. The OECD is not likely, of its own volition, to be receptive to the views of Australian citizens or citizens from anywhere else.

One important contribution was by Australian academic Patricia Randal who wrote the first account of the likely impact of the MAI on Australian policy-making. This was launched by the president of the Australian Council of Trade Unions and became the definitive statement on the issue, proving most useful for the campaign in Australia.<sup>25</sup> There were also public meetings, campaign meetings, ringing up radio stations, writing to newspapers, fundraising, rallies, and much more.

Some differences were apparent in the campaign from one country to another. In Britain, for instance, the Green Party of England and Wales instigated the campaign, whereas in Canada unconnected concerned citizens are claimed to have started and maintained the Canadian anti-MAI campaign. To the unease of many activists, racist groups played some part, albeit small, in the campaign in some countries. The MAI coordinator for Public Citizens' Global Tradewatch campaign noted that the organization worked on the MAI issue with groups with which they would not normally work and who "represent a very different group of people from the normal

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23 Goodman, "Stopping a juggernaut," p. 44.

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24 Goodman, "Stopping a juggernaut," p. 44.

25 Goodman, "Stopping a juggernaut," p. 45.

Public Citizen activists,” who can be generally described as “left-progressives.”<sup>26</sup> In Australia, however, from the very start the campaign made a concerted effort to distance itself from right-wing nationalists, in particular One Nation, which was enjoying some electoral popularity at the time. The anti-MAI campaign was particular about defining itself as being about something very different. Although representatives from both One Nation and the right-wing National Civic Council attempted to gain some influence over the campaign, they failed to do so and were quickly marginalized.<sup>27</sup> The net, however, seems to have been universally embraced.

Can a corporate push for something like the MAI be imagined as an open campaign, using paid staff to promote a corporate cause using the net? This would require a drastic shift from the model of bureaucratic planning. Movement in this direction is conceivable, given the existence of corporate front groups used for anti-environmental campaigning.<sup>28</sup> However, even in these cases, the fake citizens’ groups have nothing like the enthusiasm and autonomy of genuine activists.

The MAI was only one element in the push for corporate global domination, and not necessarily the most dangerous. Because it was promoted in secret and was a proposal with a name and aim against which people could organize, it provided an ideal target for opposition. Other processes of globalization are more incremental, such as transnational corporate mergers, global marketing strategies, and the transfer of production to regions with cheaper labor. Creeping corporate domination is more difficult to oppose than identifiable initiatives such as the MAI. The existence of the name “globalization”, in as much as it has become shorthand for the process of global

corporate domination, helps in mobilizing opposition.

The campaigns involved in the MAI issue illustrate two types of globalization: one based on large hierarchical organizations operating in secrecy and the other based on a variety of community groups promoting public education and citizen action. The two seem destined to be pitted against each other for quite some time yet.

The MAI was only part of a much larger agenda that powerful institutions are still pushing. The forging ahead of liberalized markets, even at heavy human cost, can be seen in a range of other measures, including structural adjustment programs (SAPs) and the setting up of the World Trade Organization. Yet neither of these met anywhere near the organized opposition that they might have. We need to ask why.

### The wider context

The operation of global capital has instigated numerous changes throughout the world, both in rich and poor countries, and in almost every area of life. For instance, mass advertising has spread its tentacles widely into education, sport, and most areas of leisure. Property and currency speculation, both attractive areas for global capital, have led to instability of national economies, as well as pushing the price of land way beyond the reach of many in numerous cities. In rural areas, the poor have usually fared no better, existing within disrupted communities characterized by decreased security and self-reliance. In Third World countries rural people are sometimes pushed off the land altogether or forced on to marginal land to make way for cash crops, often with environmentally damaging implications. Yet there have not generally been the levels of resistance that were witnessed in the case of opposition to the MAI. This is despite many aspects of the MAI being an intensification of inequalities already in evidence.

Among the most significant shifts brought about by global capital has been increased trade, along with associated infrastructure development and technological innovation,

26 Wood, “The international campaign against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment.”

27 Goodman, “Stopping a juggernaut,” pp. 43–44.

28 Sharon Beder, *Global Spin: The Corporate Assault on Environmentalism* (Melbourne: Scribe, 1997).

especially in transport, computers, and communication. This echoes many of the social disruptions caused by colonialism but on a greater scale. In particular, social activists have been concerned that the ability of MNCs' highly mobile capital to scour the globe seeking the cheapest labor and raw materials has led to environmental degradation and jeopardized access to food and other essential items for many of the world's poor. Nevertheless, until fairly recently that concern has not been channeled into action as effective as its opponents would have hoped.

The current globalization of capital has many roots going back to Bretton Woods where the Allied powers met in 1944, laying the framework for what has been called "the global shopping center."<sup>29</sup> The Bretton Woods system was set up with the expressed purpose of ensuring capitalist economic stability and stopping the sorts of nationalist trade rivalries that helped set the stage for World War II. Following the conclusion of the war, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank were set up, both located in Washington and both playing strong parts in pushing a US government point of view.<sup>30</sup>

The specific aim of the IMF was to monitor and help manage the operation and adjustment of the international monetary system. As well as supporting fixed exchange rates and ensuring that governments managed their balance of payments, the IMF was also a "lender of last resort" to its member nations. The World Bank, set up to channel funds for reconstruction and development, often was the lender.

The international monetary system that emerged from Bretton Woods, along with the principles of free trade embodied in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), was geared towards encouraging

expansion of world trade but favored MNCs. With the use of the US dollar as the world's carrier currency, MNCs were allowed to steam ahead with eyes set on cheaper labor and raw materials, lower taxes, and global markets.<sup>31</sup> Many perceived that the US dollar was highly overvalued, allowing US-based MNCs to expand into overseas markets and buy up national industries relatively cheaply.

Even before the setting up of the system, the terms of trade were already working increasingly against Third World countries and in favor of the heavily industrialized countries. This largely resulted from the international division of labor whereby the great majority of manufacturing industry was in the wealthy countries. The Bretton Woods institutions and arrangements merely formalized that, so that by 1980 these countries accounted for 90 per cent of such industry.<sup>32</sup> Exacerbating this was the tendency, over the years, for the price of primary products to decline in relation to the price of manufactured goods. This is evident from an example from the 1970s and 1980s. President Nyerere of Tanzania claimed that, whereas it used to be possible to purchase a tractor with the earnings from 17.25 tons of sisal, seven years later 42 tons of sisal were needed to buy exactly the same model tractor.<sup>33</sup>

While MNCs have long bemoaned trade barriers, they were quick to erect their own where it suited their purposes. These included the hoarding of mineral deposits so as to affect pricing; limiting technological diffusion; and establishing exclusive marketing networks.<sup>34</sup>

29 Richard J. Barnet and Ronald E. Müller, *Global Reach: The Power of the Multinational Corporations* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1974), p. 67.

30 For a full account of the World Bank and its workings, see Susan George and Fabrizio Sabelli, *Faith and Credit: The World Bank's Secular Empire* (London: Penguin, 1994).

31 Barnet and Müller, *Global Reach*, p. 456.

32 Willy Brandt, *North-South: A Program for Survival* (London: Pan, 1980), p. 32.

33 William D. Graf, "Anti-Brandt: a critique of northwestern prescriptions for world order," in Ralph Miliband and John Seville (eds.), *The Socialist Register 1981* (London: Merlin, 1981), pp. 20–40, at p. 36.

34 G. K. Helleiner, "World market imperfections and the developing countries," in William R. Cline (ed.), *Policy Alternatives for a New International*



Patents were also used as barriers. As of 1981, 90 per cent of foreign-held patents in developing countries were never worked in those countries.<sup>35</sup> Thus in various ways MNCs can have a stifling impact on local development and competition.

It has also been noted that certain provisions found in numerous technology contracts introduced by foreign firms in Third World countries would have been illegal under antitrust laws, had they been introduced in their home countries. Such provisions included "tie-in clauses requiring the licensee or purchaser to buy inputs from particular sources; prohibitions of export sales without the permission of the technology owner; assignment of rights to modifications or improvements by the licensee to the licensor, etc."<sup>36</sup> Less developed countries have also been disadvantaged by the restrictive practices that operate between firms, such as allocation of territorial markets, pooling and allocation of patents, trademarks, and copyrights, fixing of price relationships (including discriminatory pricing), allocation of total amounts of export business, and establishment of reciprocal exclusion or preferential dealing.<sup>37</sup> That such practices have contributed substantially to the build-up by MNCs of their own businesses in Third World countries puts the activities of the WTO and the efforts to achieve an MAI in an interesting light.

It simply cannot be assumed, therefore, that supply and demand are the key determinants of prices and levels of output, nor that the market will find its own equilibrium. It has been pointed out that the centralized decisions of MNCs with relation to the physical movement of goods and services among their various subsidiaries, for instance, along with

the character and location of future of investment, have made for "international trade and factor flows that are not governed by the spontaneous and impersonal forces of markets."<sup>38</sup>

Home governments of MNCs have also provided assistance for them in relation to both trade and aid, as was the case during the 1965–1966 famine in India. The US government withheld food aid until the Indian government agreed to the penetration of US capital into the field of fertilizers.<sup>39</sup> The US petrochemical corporations, and in particular the Rockefeller Group, did well financially from this arrangement. The order and structures which the Bretton Woods arrangements formalized and perpetuated were claimed to be of universal benefit but in practice mainly served the interests of the industrialized countries and particularly the MNCs whose home bases were in these countries.

Nevertheless, by the 1970s the Bretton Woods system had met a range of problems, more numerous and complex than can be dealt with here.<sup>40</sup> Certainly the international monetary system being tied to the success of the US economy and especially to maintenance of a US balance of payments surplus was a problem. In August 1971, US President Richard Nixon suspended the convertibility of US dollars into gold. Soon after, the system of fixed exchange rates finally collapsed. Although it had contributed to Japan and Europe's economic recovery, many leaders of the less developed countries felt that the Bretton Woods monetary, trade, and financial system had exacerbated their underdevelopment and subordination to the more developed countries and they were becoming increasingly

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*Economic Order* (New York: Praeger, 1979), pp. 357–389, at p. 369.

35 Helleiner, "World market imperfections and the developing countries," pp. 372–379.

36 Helleiner, "World market imperfections and the developing countries," p. 379.

37 Helleiner, "World market imperfections and the developing countries," p. 376.

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38 Helleiner, "World market imperfections and the developing countries," pp. 362–363.

39 Geoffrey Barraclough, "The great world crisis I," *New York Review*, 23 January 1975, pp. 20–29, at p. 25.

40 See Joan Edelman Spero, *The Politics of International Economic Relations* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982, 2nd ed), pp. 27–30, for a discussion of these.

vociferous on this point.<sup>41</sup> The other major events were the floating of the US dollar in 1973, oil price rises from 1974, and the deregulation of financial markets.

A new international economic order arose but it was far from the more equitable model for which numerous Third World leaders had been calling. Rather it was anchored by market-oriented economic policies, global technology based on information, and new roles for the old Bretton Woods institutions whose major tasks were now seen as designing new economic policies and supervising international debt agreements.<sup>42</sup>

### Structural Adjustment Programs

Many post-colonial states became heavily indebted to foreign governments and banks during the 1970s when interest rates were low and loans were particularly easy to obtain due to the hike in oil prices and consequently the oil-exporting countries having more money than could be quickly absorbed domestically. Many of the Third World governments that took advantage of these loans were not popularly elected. Numerous repressive regimes used loan funds to build up massive armaments, many to be later used against their own people.

By the 1980s interest rates were much higher than they had been in the 1970s, causing a crisis which the IMF stepped in to resolve by means of structural adjustment.<sup>43</sup>

Banks and the international financial institutions were worried that the Third World states would renege on their loans, as the Mexican government threatened to do in 1982. They were desperate to work out some solution that would ensure repayment to the banks. Renegotiations were therefore offered but under strict conditions. The IMF and the World Bank insisted that loan repayments could not be renegotiated until the borrower-state in question had adopted a structural adjustment program (SAP). Mexico, where there had been popular anger at the huge debts incurred and the heavy-handed tactics of the industrialized countries, was the first country to have a SAP imposed on it. Many national leaders felt they were forced to sign since otherwise, they believed, their country's economy would be even more drastically hurt.

Typically, a SAP would include:

- liberalization of agricultural markets, foreign exchange, trade, interests rates, and prices;
- deregulating the labor market and creating labor "flexibility";
- liberalizing and deregulating the financial system; and
- reducing and restructuring state involvement by means of eliminating subsidies, privatizing public firms, and reducing state personnel and functions.<sup>44</sup>

The effects of the reforms and restructuring imposed at the IMF's insistence were usually jettisoning of large parts of welfare

41 Spero, *The Politics of International Economic Relations*, pp. 28–29.

42 Oscar Ugarteche, "The structural adjustment stranglehold: debt and underdevelopment in the Americas," *NACLA Report on the Americas*, Vol. 33, Issue 1, July-August 1999, pp. 21–23.

43 For a full account of structural adjustment and its implications, see Susan George, *A Fate Worse Than Debt* (London: Penguin, 1994); George and Sabelli, *Faith and Credit*; Susan George, *The Debt Boomerang: How Third World Debt Harms Us All* (London: Pluto with the Transnational Institute, 1992); Morris Miller, *Coping Is Not Enough!: The International Debt Crisis and the Roles of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund*

(Homewood, IL: Dow Jones-Irwin, 1986); Chris C. Carvounis, *The Foreign Debt/National Development Conflict: External Adjustments and Internal Disorder in the Developing Nations* (New York: Quorum Books, 1986).

44 Suresh Chandra Babu, Review of *Structural Adjustment Reconsidered: Economic Policy and Poverty in Africa*, *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, Vol. 81, No. 3, August 1999, pp. 756–758, at p. 756; Walden Bello, with Shea Cunningham and Bill Rau, *Dark Victory: The United States, Structural Adjustment, and Global Poverty* (London: Pluto, 1994); Ugarteche, "The structural adjustment stranglehold."

and social services as well as deregulation. Very often this involved weakening of labor legislation. Argentina, Ecuador, and India were among the countries whose governments weakened their labor legislation or amended their land laws to qualify for a loan with the conditions imposed under structural adjustment arrangements.<sup>45</sup> What unfolded in India as a result of its reforms in compliance with these conditions paints a grim picture of the reality of structural adjustment.

The Indian government was forced to adopt a SAP in 1991, along the lines drawn up by the IMF and the World Bank. The measures demanded included:

- cutting expenditure on social programs and infrastructure;
- eliminating state subsidies and price support programs, including food and fertilizer subsidies;
- privatization of the more profitable public enterprises;
- closure of a large number of other public enterprises;
- devaluation of the currency;
- liberalization of trade to encourage entry of foreign capital;
- major reforms of banks and financial institutions, in particular a reduction of subsidized loans in rural areas;
- alteration of tax structures, including abolition of wealth tax and reduction of capital gains tax.<sup>46</sup>

A study of the effects showed that the rhetoric of what was supposed to occur as a result of this SAP was vastly different from the actual impact. For instance, the rhetoric emphasized integration with global opportunities, market freedom, and empowerment, whereas the reality was marginalization, exclusion, scarcity, and shrinking opportunities

for many people.<sup>47</sup> Also the SAP reforms were supposed to lower India's budget deficit and reduce inflation, whereas they triggered the opposite. The increased cost of imported raw materials, along with an influx of luxury imports enjoyed by the wealthy minority who benefited from tax cuts and other measures, aggravated the balance of payments crisis.<sup>48</sup>

Another major stated aim was to rapidly open up the economy to make space for globalization. On one hand, there was increasing reliance on new technologies, often involving foreign collaboration or imports. Competition was "not necessarily in terms of quality and/or costs of production but also in terms of shaping tastes and choices to carve out a wider reach of the products." This led to a large number of retrenchments.<sup>49</sup> But other units were not in a position to modernize and had difficulties competing with those that did, which also resulted in large numbers of job losses. Then there was the flow of capital into new industries, invariably in areas where there was little scope for employment growth due to technology intensiveness. Labor expansion was largely confined to the informal sector, resulting in workers becoming increasingly dispersed, disconnected, and exploited, leading to greater marginalization and difficulties for the poor.

Particularly affected were women, many of whom suffered the negative outcomes of structural adjustment silently, sometimes even voluntarily to reduce the burden on others. In many cases women served as "shock absorbers" for the worst aspects of the reforms and were badly affected by new forms of control, new emphases on property rights, and technologies that facilitated centralization and

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45 Kamran Abbasi, "Under fire," *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 318, 1998, pp. 1003–1006, at p. 1003.

46 Michel Chossudovsky, "India under IMF rule," *Ecologist*, Vol. 22, No. 6, November/December 1992, pp. 271–275.

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47 Dooly Arora, "Structural adjustment program and gender concerns in India," *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 29, Issue 3, August 1999, pp. 328–361, at p. 328.

48 Chossudovsky, "India under IMF rule," p. 271.

49 Arora, "Structural adjustment program and gender concerns in India," p. 332.

control over various economic processes.<sup>50</sup> Indian women had long been oppressed and affirmative action and policies aimed at alleviating some of women's worst difficulties were essential. The Indian SAP made it virtually impossible for the bulk of women to overcome their gender-related impoverishment.

Jamaican women, given the chance, may have been able to tell Indian women that it would be so, for that was also their experience after Jamaican Prime Minister Michael Manly signed a \$74 million emergency loans agreement with the IMF in 1977. The following year, in a precursor to the formal SAPs that were to come in the 1980s, the World Bank demanded that the government favor exports over domestic needs in exchange for loans to the Jamaican Public Service Company and the Sugar Industry Authority. A sharp decline in living standards followed, largely resulting from the collapse of the local garment industry. Few women could be absorbed in the new export industries; those who found work in the Free Trade Zone were classified as unskilled and paid pitiful wages. There were also cutbacks in health and education.<sup>51</sup>

In Uganda one third of the public sector work force was laid off, such were the enforced cuts in that area.<sup>52</sup> Russia is among the latest countries to be affected by a program that included drastic cuts in services and subsidies, devaluation of the rouble, and massive privatization. This has resulted in a rise in electoral support for right-wing nationalism.<sup>53</sup>

According to a study published in the *British Medical Journal*, structural adjustment

is responsible for a drop of 10–25% in average incomes, a 25% reduction in spending per capita on health, and a 50% reduction in spending per capita on education in the poorest countries of the world. UNICEF claims that this has led directly to the deaths of half a million young children.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, the gap between rich and poor countries has widened enormously rather than narrowed. At the same time as the per capita gross domestic product fell by 30% in the world's ten poorest countries, it doubled in the ten richest.<sup>55</sup> Not surprisingly, the process of structural adjustment as it has been applied in Africa has been described as "recolonization."<sup>56</sup>

Nor have the SAPs resulted in pegging back the debt. Total Third World debt rose from \$751 billion in 1981 to \$1,355 billion in 1990.<sup>57</sup> The struggle to pay off the debt can be crippling as is seen by the case of Guyana where, since the late 1980s, nearly 80 per cent of government revenues and 60 per cent of export earnings have gone to service and repay foreign debt. Since essential services have been starved of funding, malnutrition, infant mortality, disease, unemployment, and poverty have all soared.<sup>58</sup> Since the 1980s, SAPs have contributed to a new outflow of wealth from Third World countries that have paid out five times as much capital to the industrialized countries as they have received.<sup>59</sup> The US Treasury Department has calculated that for every dollar the United States contributes to international development banks, US exporters

50 Arora, "Structural adjustment program and gender concerns in India," p. 329.

51 Joan Ross Frankson, "Hagglers, higgles and empty stomachs," *New Internationalist*, December 1990, pp. 20–21.

52 Richard Swift, "Squeezing the South: 50 Years is enough," *New Internationalist*, July 1994, pp. 4–7.

53 "Adjusting structures, destroying lives — an NI map," supplement to *New Internationalist*, July 1994.

54 Abbasi, "Under fire," p. 1003.

55 Ugarteche, "The structural adjustment stranglehold," p. 21.

56 Wayne Ellwood, "Pinstripes and poverty: inside the World Bank," *New Internationalist*, December 1990, pp. 4–6, at p. 6.

57 Swift, "Squeezing the South."

58. Susan Meeker-Lowry, "Removing the noose," *New Internationalist*, April 1996, pp. 15–16, at p. 15.

59 U.S. Network for Global Economic Justice, "50 Years is Enough," <http://www.50years.org/>, at <http://www.50years.org/update/questions.html>.

win more than two dollars in bank-financed procurement contracts.<sup>60</sup>

Even where some people within the country do well, the “trickle-down effect” has proved either negligible or non-existent. As wealth gets rechanneled into the hands of elites, they tend to buy more imported goods, adding to their country's deficit while providing few opportunities for small businesses and marginalized workers who, in contrast, would usually spend their money locally. Critics point to the vast social problems created by SAPs but there appear to be few successes, in terms of helping the poor, to which the advocates of SAPs can point.

### The World Trade Organization

The World Trade Organization embraces the same philosophies and economic hopes as the engineers of SAPs. Established on 1 January 1995 after an eight-year process of trade negotiations known as the Uruguay Round of GATT, the WTO is probably as aggressive an advocate of global capital as the world has seen, being described as “the policy voice, the muscle, and ultimately the fist of transnational corporations.”<sup>61</sup>

The WTO replaced GATT but with a much wider brief. Whereas GATT was concerned principally with repealing tariffs — although seeking to expand its scope during its Uruguay Round — the WTO is concerned with a range of issues which it perceives as barriers to trade. Essentially its brief is to codify the rules upon which a global system of investment, production, and trade depends and, in doing

so, to radically deregulate international trade.<sup>62</sup> It has gone about this ruthlessly.<sup>63</sup>

The WTO oversees more than a dozen distinct trade agreements whose articles spell out serious threats to the environment, world health, small-scale agriculture, and those schemes and national laws aimed at alleviating poverty. It attempts to make the lowest environmental standards the general standards, as has been the plan with NAFTA. The WTO has sought to overturn national laws that MNCs claim to be barriers to trade. For instance, in 1997 the WTO overturned part of the US Clean Air Act that had prevented the import of low quality fuel with a higher than normal potential for air pollution. The following year the organization declared illegal a US regulation requiring that imported shrimp be caught by methods that minimized harm to endangered sea turtles.<sup>64</sup>

Bans on the import of dangerous materials can be overturned, as well as pollution control regulations.<sup>65</sup> Canada initiated proceedings in the WTO tribunal to overturn a French ban on import of chrysolite asbestos, of which Canada is a major producer.<sup>66</sup> Following heavy lobbying by Monsanto, the US National Cattlemen's Association, and other organizations, the US Trade Representative initiated action against a European Union ban on hormone-treated beef. The ban hurt US exporters, since 90 per cent of US cattle were being treated with some type of growth hormone by 1995. The WTO ruled against the ban, thereby making it illegal to use the precautionary principle, as the European Union had, to ban products on

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60 U.S. Network for Global Economic Justice, “50 Years is Enough.”

61 Peter Montague, “The WTO and free trade,” *Rachel's Environment and Health News*, #673 & #674, 21 & 28 October 1999, <http://www.rachel.org/>.

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62 Steven Shrybman, “The World Trade Organization: the New World Order laid bare,” *Ecologist*, Vol. 29, No. 4, July 1999, pp. 270–275.

63 Lori Wallach and Michelle Sforza, *Whose Trade Organization? Corporate Globalization and the Erosion of Democracy* (Washington, DC: Public Citizen, 1999).

64 Montague, “The WTO and free trade.”

65 Shrybman, “The World Trade Organization.”

66 Wood, “The international campaign against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment.”

health grounds.<sup>67</sup> At least one other ruling by the WTO has similarly made it illegal to penalize products from manufacturers involved financially or otherwise in regimes where human rights are abused.<sup>68</sup> Altogether during the first four years of the WTO's existence, there were 177 cases in which a government challenged a law or practice of another country by invoking WTO rules.<sup>69</sup>

At a macro level, the WTO has an obvious impact on state sovereignty, not dissimilar to the proposed MAI. It also has significant impact at the micro level, with small farmers, for example, faring poorly under the 700 pages of rules written by the WTO. The elimination of trade barriers has seen Third World economies inundated with cheap food from major grain-exporting countries, driving down the prices local farmers receive for their produce. Small farmers are finding it increasingly difficult to compete against highly mechanized, large-scale intensive farming. There is a social as well as economic loss from the swallowing up of small holdings, leaving local economies in tatters. On the other hand, land reform, when pursued, not only creates a small-farm economy which is beneficial for local economic development but has social benefits, since the poor are not driven off the land and into burgeoning cities.<sup>70</sup> Small holdings are generally also less environmentally harmful and yet usually produce more agricultural output than an equivalent area of larger farms, now widely known as the "inverse relationship between farm size and output."<sup>71</sup>

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67 Public Citizen Global Trade Watch, "The MAI shell game: the World Trade Organization (WTO)," [http://www.tradewatch.org/Shell\\_Game/Wto.htm](http://www.tradewatch.org/Shell_Game/Wto.htm)

68 Ted Bardacke, "American boycotts start to bite," *Financial Times*, 2 June 1997.

69 Public Citizen Global Trade Watch, "The MAI shell game."

70 Peter Rosset, "Small is bountiful," *Ecologist*, Vol. 29, No. 8, December 1999, pp. 452–456.

71 Rosset, "Small is bountiful," p. 453.

Some have claimed hypocrisy in relation to the WTO's insistence that there be no favoritism shown for local or small businesses. The corporations based in highly developed countries have mostly enjoyed considerable support from their home governments, especially in their early days. This included public investments, state partnerships with infant industries, and explicit favoritism for national as opposed to foreign-owned enterprise. These are the very tactics that the WTO has declared illegal.

But now the WTO wants the exact opposite for Third World countries, as is seen by one of the agreements negotiated within its framework in 1997, relating to the liberalization of financial services sectors, including banking and insurance. Many Third World countries, until recently, had policies in place to protect the domestic banking and insurance sectors.

Yet, the problems brought about by the WTO are not confined to Third World countries, as is clear from the threats to national health care schemes in industrialized countries. In its attempts to incorporate traditional areas of public services into the free market, the WTO is forcing the dismantling of socialized healthcare in Europe and elsewhere. Policy initiatives such as compulsory competitive tendering and public infrastructure privatization are threatening the health safety nets previously put in place and breaking down the systems whereby society at large took some share of the economic responsibility for the costs of ill health.<sup>72</sup> As usual, this is being done with little public debate and virtually no attempts to scrutinize likely health outcomes. The goals of universality of healthcare and equity in access are being replaced by the rhetoric of consumer sovereignty, which is another way of saying that ultimately the health care one receives is dependent on what one can afford.

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72 Jean Shaoul, "How the World Trade Organization is shaping domestic policies in health care," *The Lancet*, Vol. 345, 27 November 1999, pp. 1889–1892.

Moreover, many of the actions of the World Bank, IMF, and WTO, despite their rhetorical concern for efficiency, are counter-productive in a wider social sense. Their drive for micro-efficiency leads to what has been called macro-insufficiency, as small and medium sized enterprises are driven into bankruptcy and large amounts of human and physical resources stand idle, laid off, or bypassed by the global policies.<sup>73</sup> Their actions also frequently defy logic, even of their own economically narrow kind. For instance, in 1992 the World Bank made \$US\$ million available to China for greenhouse gas reduction but at the same time proposed \$630 million in loans to the same country for fossil fuel development.<sup>74</sup>

An important aspect of the WTO is its disciplinary measures, enforced through dispute tribunals that meet in secret and consist of undemocratically selected representatives from corporations. These tribunals are under no obligation to publish their findings and their rulings are final and not subject to appeal.<sup>75</sup> Their capacity for demanding annual compensation for victors in their rulings or to impose non-negotiated trade sanctions adds to the power of the WTO and its ability to demand compliance in accord with its own agenda. Although the WTO does not have its own troops to exercise coercive force, violence is definitely involved in implementation of its policies by governments, as well as structural violence associated with inequitable economic arrangements.<sup>76</sup>

## Resistance and barriers to resistance

The implications of both structural adjustment programs and the WTO's ravenous appetite for liberalization at any cost are so enormous that one might expect them to have been challenged with widespread campaigns of civil disobedience and mass actions. Yet, arguably, resistance was more sporadic and sometimes less focused on the institutions than might be expected to have been the case. Reflecting the disadvantages of attempting to take on global institutions and MNCs, it took a number of years to build up to the enormous public outrage expressed on the streets of Seattle in November-December 1999 coinciding with the scheduled WTO meeting. Subsequent major protest in Washington, DC, Prague, Melbourne, and other cities at meetings of global economic elites reveal that substantial momentum has built up. Certainly, since the early 1990s NGOs and activists world-wide have been attempting to target many of these problems at their source rather than concentrating solely on the local symptoms. However, prior to the campaign against the MAI, there was relatively little effective and highly visible action directed at the institutions responsible for many of the problems. For instance, Dooly Arora has noted in relation to SAPs that the schemes had not generated as much active resistance as their nature warrants.<sup>77</sup> A brief overview of the resistance is useful here.

The resistance has been both local and later global. From the early days of structural adjustment, Mexicans took to the streets, as they did later against NAFTA and GATT. Women also held demonstrations against the effects of structural adjustment in Jamaica. Voters have supported candidates standing on anti-SAP platforms in Venezuela, Argentina, and Brazil, but it has made little difference. "Those who buy and sell government bonds and hold the nation's debt will see to it that SAPs get implemented anyway," one observer

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73 Michel Chossudovsky, "Global poverty in the late 20th century," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 52, Issue 1, Fall 1998, pp. 293–311.

74 Lorraine Elliott, *The Global Politics of the Environment* (London: Macmillan, 1998), p. 203.

75 Wood, "The international campaign against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment."

76 On structural violence see, for example, Johan Galtung, *The True Worlds: A Transnational Perspective* (New York: Free Press, 1980).

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77 Arora, "Structural adjustment program and gender concerns in India," p. 329.

lamented.<sup>78</sup> This suggests that relying on politicians to challenge institutions such as the World Bank and IMF is unwise and must, at the very least, be accompanied by other strategies involving networks and grassroots activism.

More visible and better publicized internationally have been some of the major protests against World Bank projects, especially those to do with dams such as the Narmada Dam project in India. Once again women's groups were heavily involved in the protests. They attempted first to establish the rights of the directly affected people before moving to a campaign that involved hunger strikes and other activities for which protesters were arrested.<sup>79</sup> The movement against the Narmada Dam, called Narmada Bachao Andolan, was characterized by its diversity and its support for communities that were dislocated and dispersed by the project.<sup>80</sup> These campaigns were inspiring and even partially effective, as some claim that the World Bank has shown more trepidation in funding large-scale dams since the bad publicity generated by resistance groups such as Narmada Bachao Andolan. Nevertheless, they have been of a somewhat reactive nature, opposing individual projects that are the symptoms of globalization, even while fully understanding the wider picture and having a very thorough analysis. Meanwhile, campaigns addressing the roots of globalization seemed to be lagging behind.

Similarly, there have been a number of actions taken against MNCs in relation to their global practices, if not in respect to their globalization per se. Most well-known among these was the boycott of Nestles, particularly

in response to its aggressive marketing practices that were misleading mothers in Third World countries to believing that baby milk formula was a better option than breast milk for their children.

In Australia there was a boycott of the fishing company SAFCOL because its operations in South-East Asia disrupted local communities through insensitive and environmentally unsound operations. Boycotts are no doubt useful and can be highly effective, but they do need to be well thought through and to be instigated in response to requests from local people, who can be detrimentally affected by boycotts.<sup>81</sup> They can also be difficult to enforce. For instance it is much more difficult to carry out a boycott against Nestles in Australia nowadays as the MNC has bought up numerous previously Australian companies and has a virtual monopoly in some food lines. Operating under the original names of the products' manufacturers, it is also difficult for activists to spread the information that these companies are now part of the Nestles group. Activists face ever-new challenges.

What were the problems confronting activists that resulted in resistance being initially somewhat sporadic and less focused on global institutions and the unjust framework within which they operated? This is a difficult question and we can only suggest some possible answers. It does seem that global institutions enjoyed enormous benefit from being so integral to global directions and yet playing an apparent "backseat" role in that they were less visible, less well known, and were able to go about their business while heads of governments — if not the victims themselves — took the major blame.

If this is a huge advantage for the global institutions and those who benefit from their strategies, it makes resistance correspondingly harder for those worst affected. According to

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78 Swift, "Squeezing the South," p. 7.

79 Medha Patkar, "Armada against Narmada," *New Internationalist*, April 1992, pp. 16–17.

80 Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash, "Grassroots resistance to sustainable development: lessons from the banks of the Narmada," *Ecologist*, Vol. 22, No. 2, March/April 1992, pp. 45–51; Uday Turaga, "Damming waters and wisdom: protest in the Narmada River Valley," *Technology in Society*, Vol. 22, No. 2, April 2000, pp. 237–253.

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81 William Kaempfer, Anton D. Lowenberg, H. Naci Mocan, and Lynne Bennett, "Foreign threats and domestic actions: sanctions against South Africa," in Paul Wehr, Heidi Burgess, and Guy Burgess (eds.), *Justice Without Violence* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1994), pp. 191–215.



Arora, the SAPs themselves make it difficult for the worst sufferers to offer much resistance as they are busily tied up with new problems in making ends meet.<sup>82</sup> Obviously these are also the people who are already most poorly resourced. The dispersion and casualization of work have made it extremely difficult for the most exploited workers and newly unemployed to organize.

Some NGOs have seen their task as giving a voice to these exploited people. Arguably, while being vociferous, most of them have not been as active, coordinated, or focused on the central problems as early as they might have been. Of course, NGOs themselves face considerable difficulties. If we take the case of India again, which has been described as having entrenched and elaborate ideological systems that legitimize inequality and exploitation, NGO workers at the grassroots level have noted numerous hindrances facing them and the impoverished people with whom they work. These include illiteracy, poor health, traditions, addictions, superstitions, fear, and internal divisions. It has been noted, too, that the remnants of semi-feudal patron-client relationships and the mentality that has long accompanied such relationships still persist and provide the framework through which many people understand their position and envisage solutions.<sup>83</sup> These difficulties and cultural overlays are not unique to India. James C. Scott, conducting research in Malaysia, confronted at least some of them.<sup>84</sup> While these difficulties existed before SAPs, they interact with the harsher conditions imposed by structural adjustment and help obfuscate the many interrelated factors of poverty, as well as hindering resistance.

Despite Arora's valid points, there was massive resistance in India when the SAP was imposed there. In 1992, on the anniversary of Gandhi's birth, half a million farmers gathered in Hospet, Karnataka, to protest the SAP and the government's economic policies that accorded with it. The demonstrators pledged to struggle for Gandhi's concept of *swaraj* (self rule) and to resist policies aimed at handing over food and seed production to MNCs.<sup>85</sup> In the state of Uttar Pradesh, thousands of farmers were arrested after protesting the removal of subsidies. At Ramkola in Uttar Pradesh, police shot four protesters. Protests continued, as did arrests, with demonstrators taking up the chant "A government that rules with bullets and batons will not last."<sup>86</sup>

Another reason for there being less resistance against SAPs than has been warranted is that the contradictory rhetoric of structural adjustment actually generates hope. It is made to sound so attractive that people are not sufficiently suspicious of it from the start, coming as it does with the endorsement of a coterie of experts and economists who say, as does the World Bank, that their aim is to abolish world poverty and that public services and regulations are barriers to this.<sup>87</sup> By instilling such confidence in their measures, the World Bank and IMF are thereby able to provide time "to the beneficiaries of policies to strengthen the hold over the reality."<sup>88</sup> It is always easier to oppose trends from the very start than to later try to turn back the tide of changes in that direction. The institutions and those enforcing their policies have also created the illusion of participation in the policy processes through symbolic association with

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82 Arora, "Structural adjustment program and gender concerns in India," p. 329.

83 Elizabeth Mathiot, "Attaining justice through development organizations in India," in Wehr et al., *Justice Without Violence*, pp. 233–256.

84 James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985).

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85 Vandana Shiva, "Structural adjustment and Indian agriculture," *Ecologist*, Vol. 22, No. 6, November/December 1992, p. 274.

86 Shiva, "Structural adjustment and Indian agriculture," p. 274.

87 Shaoul, "How the World Trade Organization is shaping domestic policies in health care."

88 Arora, "Structural adjustment program and gender concerns in India," p. 329.

decision-making structures. All these methods work to delay or weaken resistance.<sup>89</sup>

The IMF, World Bank, and WTO have also sought to create a different picture of their efforts by manipulating figures. This is starkly shown in the threshold adopted by the World Bank to categorize who is poor and who is not and, more importantly from its own point of view, to be able to minimize the overall picture of poverty. In the Third World anybody who is living on any more than the equivalent of one dollar a day is “non-poor” according to the World Bank definition. Simply ignoring the real cost of living faced by the victims of SAPs, the global institutions are then able to devise, from their simple but socially meaningless arithmetic, glossy tables suggesting that poverty is on the decline. This adds to the propaganda-created perceptions that the policies are working. The institutions are helped in this by media that are often enthusiastic about the policies and talk excitedly about “sustained and increasingly global economic growth.”<sup>90</sup>

Critics have not been sitting on their hands, for there was much criticism of the IMF and World Bank policies right from the start and much concern at the establishment of a WTO which would zealously oversee not only trade in commodities but also in services and intellectual property rights. (Also many NGOs were doing important work at the grassroots level. To help raise the standard of health and education is to prepare the groundwork for people to become active.) But initially the criticism seemed to suffer from not being sufficiently joined with effective actions on a large enough scale to really make a visible impact.

A concerted effort was made to change the focus from the symptoms to the institutional and global causes in 1994, with the launch of a “Fifty Years Is Enough” campaign to coincide

with the 50th anniversary of Bretton Woods, which sought to publicize how the further impoverishment of many of the world’s people was tied up with the strategies of the IMF and the World Bank.

As indicated by this campaign, numerous NGOs acknowledge the need to initiate transformative programs and to play a part in the resistance to the widening global gap between rich and poor. Accordingly a number of them have skewed their efforts in this area. One person who has worked among grassroots organizations in India notes that there is “the unfolding of a new nonviolent movement in India” and that many of the grassroots organizations involved have goals of participation, emancipation, decentralization, democracy, nonviolence, and self-sufficiency.<sup>91</sup>

In terms of what might have been done, many of the nonviolent strategies that could be recommended were in fact used, though perhaps not on a large enough scale nor with quite the timing, co-ordination, and solidarity that might have enhanced effectiveness. In Malaysia, when landowners brought in machinery for harvesting, thereby denying traditional work to the laborers, women within villages banded together to enforce a cautious boycott on transplanting, hoping to force the owners to revert to hand harvesting so as to be assured of their services. However, landowners would bring in labor from nearby villages so that the boycott was easily broken. Indeed, those who would boycott transplanting in their own area would sometimes take part in “strike-breaking” in nearby villages, making the whole boycott effort virtually futile. Actions that could have been extremely powerful, if undertaken collectively and across much wider regions, collapsed for lack of support outside of their immediate vicinity.<sup>92</sup>

Resistance to corporate globalization has not always been nonviolent, as shown by the response to the SAP imposed on Venezuela, which took the form of street riots in 1989. In

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89 Arora, “Structural adjustment program and gender concerns in India,” p. 329.

90 Chossudovsky, “Global poverty in the late 20th century,” p. 298, quoting a *Financial Times* editorial.

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91 Mathiot, “Attaining justice through development organizations in India,” pp. 233–238.

92 Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, pp. 248–255.

the same country military dissidents threatened by the cutbacks from the SAP staged two violent coup attempts. We can, therefore, retrospectively identify this as one area where additional effort might have been made to develop and demonstrate the advantages of nonviolent responses.

Most responses, though, have been nonviolent, often taking the forms of civil disobedience and disruption of the system. For instance, in Karnataka in India small farmers, anticipating that the eucalyptus trees planted under an IMF-supported program would benefit lumber industry interests but not the community, pulled up the tree seedlings.<sup>93</sup> In Argentina when pension plans were drastically scaled down under an SAP in 1992, there were mass demonstrations and a series of individual protests.<sup>94</sup>

If one goal of action is to win over people from the opposition, then some effort should be made to “convert” workers at the World Bank, the IMF, and the WTO. Very occasionally, one or two of them “change their minds,” as was the case with Davison Budhoo. He had been a senior economist with the IMF and had been responsible for implementing SAPs in Africa, Latin American, and the Caribbean. Eventually he resigned, disgusted and hoping to “wash my hands of the blood of millions of poor and starving people.”<sup>95</sup> He helped launch the Bretton Woods Reform Organization which seeks to design Alternative Structural Adjustment Programs that combine direct grassroots involvement with the technical skills of government officials and other interest groups, towards the goal of meeting the basic needs of the entire population.

This is, of course, another important part of nonviolent action, namely to actually build the alternative structures needed to replace the structures of oppression. People’s involvement in these alternative structures gives them experience and hope in the practicalities of the

alternative methods and social relationships. Several countries, suffering under the weight of SAPs, have requested assistance from the Bretton Woods Reform Organization. For instance, in Papua New Guinea a coalition of 35 organizations, including trade unions and church, student, women’s, and other community groups, has called for the renegotiation of that country’s SAP and hopes that the Bretton Woods Reform Organization will be able to help.<sup>96</sup>

Meanwhile activists in industrialized countries have organized to resist the jettisoning of labor laws and other social benefits. Across France, demonstrations took place to defend labor legislation, with masses of people chanting “We fought to win it, we will fight to protect it.” Similarly, in South Korea workers demanded new and improved labor laws and received them, in spite of trends working in the opposite direction elsewhere.<sup>97</sup>

Perhaps the opposition to NAFTA and the Uruguay round of GATT marked a watershed. In response to these developments an International Forum on Globalization was formed. Based in San Francisco, this campaign used e-mail networking and held regular meetings and teach-ins through which strategies and programs of action were developed. It can be seen as a trial run for the campaign against the MAI.<sup>98</sup>

Furthermore, there has been a keen acknowledgement that the struggle is not yet over. This was evident from the mass actions in Seattle and other cities. That the fight against the MAI is seen as ongoing is evident from a court case being brought in Canada where citizens are suing the government for preparing to sign away its powers under the MAI. The Defence of Canadian Liberty Committee claims that the MAI is unconstitutional under Canadian law, as “it gives entrenched rights to international banks and

93 Ellwood, “Pinstripes and poverty,” p. 6.

94 “Adjusting structures, destroying lives — an NI map.”

95 Meeker-Lowry, “Removing the noose,” p. 15.

96 Meeker-Lowry, “Removing the noose,” p. 16.

97 Richard Swift, “Just do it!” *New Internationalist*, November 1997, pp. 14–16.

98 Wood, “The international campaign against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment.”

foreign corporations guaranteed by international law which Canadian citizens do not have,” thus breaching the principles of equity before the law enshrined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.<sup>99</sup> Although the Canadian government has tried to assert that it is no longer relevant since MAI negotiations broke down, the citizens are keen to pursue the court case, since it has ramifications for future treaties, calling into question the legitimacy of politicians and bureaucrats to enter into such arrangements with far-reaching implications that have not been endorsed by the citizenry. The court case seeks to challenge the legitimacy generally of international rules, financial mechanisms, and regulations governing the movement of capital.

Activists know, however, that they cannot afford to have all their eggs in “legal baskets.” They must gather more grassroots support and pay careful attention to strategy. For example, the demonstrations in Seattle were only part of a much larger event that involved teach-ins, workshops, and strategy sessions. In Canada community groups, unions, student, and environmental groups took part in a Cross-Canada Caravan that toured the country spreading information about the WTO and the broader picture of injustice in which it is embedded.<sup>100</sup> Following Seattle, these activities continued. Just as Canadians led the way in the campaign against the MAI, their continued actions can be expected to be replicated by activists globally.

## Conclusion

Corporate globalization has been promoted by institutions such as the World Bank, IMF, and WTO as well as by MNCs and governments of rich countries. Numerous activists have opposed this form of globalization by undertak-

ing a range of actions, such as small farmers in Uttar Pradesh with their commitment to justice and Gandhian principles, even in the face of grave violence by the state. It has been action by NGOs networking across the globe that has captured world attention, especially in the success against the MAI, a success that appears to have been unmatched in any prior resistance against the offending global trends.

However, it is important not to presume that the activities of the NGOs in industrialized countries, with their better resources and the advantage of mostly speaking a common language (even if as a second language), are more imperative than nonviolent actions by peasants and workers “at the coal face.” They are complementary, with the everyday action of those in Third World countries providing the foundation of the struggle. Successful collaboration between NGOs in rich countries and grassroots movements in poor countries is not guaranteed. As Miriam Solomon points out, there are vast discrepancies in the resource bases of these organizations and those whose causes they purport to espouse. This can lead to various breakdowns at different levels, as those who feel better positioned attempt to speak for others.<sup>101</sup>

Sometimes collaboration itself is not certain, even where deserving and sought. When representatives of Nigeria's Ogoni people approached Greenpeace and Amnesty International about the grave environmental and human rights abuses against which they were nonviolently struggling, they were initially told that these organizations could not help. Fortunately, the organizations later came to provide international assistance.<sup>102</sup>

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99 Michel Chossudovsky, “Fighting MAIgalomania: Canadian citizens sue their government,” *Ecologist*, Vol. 29, No. 8, December 1999, pp. 449–451.

100 Cross-Canada WTO Caravan, <http://wtocaravan.org/default.htm>

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101 Miriam Solomon, “Lap-tops against communicative democracy: international non-governmental organisations and the World Bank,” in Brian Martin (ed.), *Technology and Public Participation* (Wollongong: Science and Technology Studies, University of Wollongong; <http://www.bmartin.cc/pubs/99tpp/>, 1999), pp. 61–81.

102 Joshua Cooper, “The Ogoni struggle for human rights and a civil society in Nigeria,” in Stephen Zunes, Lester R. Kurtz, and Sarah Beth Asher (eds), *Nonviolent Social Movements: A*

Nevertheless, activists know they must build on struggles. One major reason for the success of the campaign against the MAI was that it built on the nonviolent actions that went before it. Much of this was simply collecting and disseminating data and stories of real experiences so that the myths associated with World Bank, IMF, and WTO policies were challenged at last.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the movement against the MAI is that the protests and actions appear to have been so coordinated and organized, even within such non-hierarchical and informal structures, giving heart that hierarchies are not necessary for good communication. This was accomplished because all had in common a well defined goal and because communication, being crucial, was a strong focus. This allowed people to take their own individual actions towards the broader goals within configurations of agreement. Activists shared a consensus that the cause was worthy without being overburdened by bureaucratic constraints.

Another major factor was that anti-MAI activists employed efficacious communication techniques and technologies to achieve their desired goals. This made the campaign stand out above ongoing struggles against the World Bank, IMF, and structural adjustment.

The campaign shares many similarities with the successes of the forced resignation of Suharto and the defeat of the Soviet coup described in chapters 2 and 3. In the cases of the MAI and Suharto, resisters appear to have paid close attention to co-ordination and communication. Both knew what they were up against, having had previous experience of what their opponents were capable of and the way they worked. In this much, they learned from the campaigns that went before them.

The earlier barriers to action included insufficient interest in the issue from many people around the world. Activists face a constant struggle to build campaigning momentum that can most likely be effective when more people are involved. Other barriers

were the resources and global power of the opponents, a multitude of different languages spoken by the people most affected, divisions between campaigners, sometimes harsh repression for resisters, and the constant day-to-day problems faced by those whose first priority is to feed themselves and their families. As Scott noted of the people he studied in a Malaysian village, "Lacking any realistic possibility, for the time being, of directly and collectively redressing their situation, the village poor have little choice but to adjust, as best they can, to the circumstances they confront daily."<sup>103</sup> Thus, one of the biggest challenges is to help empower those people so that they are in a position to directly, collectively, and nonviolently redress their situation.

Even with the campaign against the MAI and the Seattle and subsequent protests serving as reminders of the potential of nonviolent action, much still remains to be achieved. The WTO's powers have not been reduced. Its interventions have forced reversals of socially beneficial laws in several countries.

The challenge is for activists to use the best possible tactics, the most appropriate technology, and the best possible use of their talents in an innovative manner to aim at key targets in their campaigning efforts. They need to undermine individual policies and treaties, the institutions responsible for them, and the myths underlying both policies and institutions. These myths include the idea that freeing up trade is necessarily good for competition and that the benefits trickle down to all sections of society. Activists also need to confront the power of the MNCs, which already control more than one third of the world's productive assets but now want to control all government policies as well.<sup>104</sup>

Solidarity will be crucial. There have been attempts to divide the opposition by holding talks with some NGOs on specific issues, with the potential to create resentment between

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*Geographical Perspective* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 189–202, at pp. 192–193.

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103 Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, p. 246.

104 Shrybman, "The World Trade Organization," p. 270.

those who resist co-optation and those who are flattered at being “consulted.”<sup>105</sup> That solidarity will need to stand firm in the face of coercion, as it has already been seen that some governments are willing — and eager — to use their police forces to counter, intimidate, and break up opposition. A seminar on globalization being held in Geneva in 1998, for instance, was raided by Swiss police and everyone present was arrested, the police claiming their action was “preventative” as a joint conference of the UN and the International Chamber of Commerce was shortly to take place. Further police raids followed on the offices of People’s Global Action, with computer equipment and discs being seized.<sup>106</sup> Global institutions and supporting governments take the opposition very seriously and can be expected to act accordingly.

The secretary-general of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development expressed his concern that “Having once tasted blood, the NGOs involved [in the anti-MAI campaign] will not relax their bite. On the contrary, the clash would grow and could end up infecting other related aspects of the WTO’s agenda ... to the detriment of the broader process of trade liberalization and possibly damaging the credibility of the WTO itself.”<sup>107</sup> Nonviolent activists opposed to global corporate domination will want to ensure that his worst fears come true.

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105 Chossudovsky, “Fighting MAIgalomania,” p. 451.

106 Wood, “The international campaign against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment.”

107 Cited in Goodman, “Conclusion,” p. 228.

## 5

# Nonviolence theory: insights for communication

How can nonviolent action against repression, aggression, and oppression be improved? Our focus here is on the role of communication. In fast-breaking events such as the 1991 Soviet coup, communication is obviously important for mobilizing and coordinating resistance, winning over opponents, and alerting people outside the immediate situation. Just as important to consider are times when action is needed but little or none occurs, such as periods in Soviet history when serious repression occurred but there was insufficient or ineffective opposition. In such situations, it may be useful to focus on barriers to effective communication and action.

In this chapter we approach this issue through scrutinizing ideas from a number of theorists of nonviolent action and social defense. We look specifically at how communication fits into their frameworks and how they might deal with the problem of absence of action. In the next chapter we look at communication theories. Through these two chapters we canvass a wide range of ideas, always seeking what can help opponents of repression, aggression, and oppression.

Note that this is not a complete survey of nonviolence theory. Nor do we attempt to give a comprehensive treatment of the work of any particular theorist. Rather, our aim is to examine some key perspectives to draw out insights relevant to communication and nonviolence. In some cases, the lessons may be primarily negative: namely, the approach might not be a useful one for the purposes here. Even then, there can be value in ruling out certain directions and hence needing to search elsewhere.

## Gandhi

Mohandas K. Gandhi was the foremost practitioner of nonviolent action in the twentieth century and the inspiration for many of those

who followed him.<sup>1</sup> During his time in South Africa in the early 1900s, he became involved in campaigns against discrimination, gradually developing his experience and understanding of nonviolent action. On returning to India, he soon became a leader in the country's struggle against British colonial rule.

Perhaps the most famous campaign led by Gandhi was the 1930 salt march.<sup>2</sup> The British claimed a monopoly on the manufacture of salt and taxed its sale. Following extensive preparation and nonviolence training, Gandhi led a 24-day march to the sea with the express intent of making salt from seawater, a form of civil disobedience. The salt laws provided an excellent target, since they symbolized British oppression and could be challenged by popular action. The march itself provided a potent means of mobilizing support along the way, so that momentum could be gathered before engaging in the civil disobedience. There were parallel salt law disobedience actions around the country.

The British responded with mass arrests, beatings of demonstrators with lathis (wooden batons), and firing on unarmed crowds. The salt campaign was followed by negotiations, but the British reneged on some of their promises. Nevertheless, the campaign generated great support for the independence movement both in India and around the world.

The effectiveness of nonviolent action in challenging and ending British colonial rule is

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1 Mohandas K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or the Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1927); Richard B. Gregg, *The Power of Nonviolence* (New York: Schocken Books, [1935] 1966); Krishnalal Shridharani, *War Without Violence: A Study of Gandhi's Method and its Accomplishments* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1939).

2 Thomas Weber, *On the Salt March: The Historiography of Gandhi's March to Dandi* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 1997).

sometimes belittled by the claim that the British were benign colonialists. However, the effects on India were hardly benign. In 1760, at the beginning of the industrial revolution, India's wealth and industry were equal to or better than England's. Things were difficult for the poor in each country. But while wealth increased dramatically in England over the decades, India remained shackled and impoverished. Indeed, British colonial rule destroyed the foundation for Indian economic development and fostered social rifts. The overall cost of imperialism in terms of lost and blighted lives was enormous.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, British imperialists were hardly soft-hearted humanitarians. In Kenya, another British colony, the violent Mau Mau rebellion was met by horrendous killing and torture, with prison camps set up around the country.<sup>4</sup> Arguably, there were relatively few direct killings in India in large part because the resistance was nonviolent, not because the British were especially kind.

Gandhi was concerned with much more than independence from Britain. He campaigned against oppression from the Indian caste system, especially discrimination against so-called "untouchables." He promoted economic self-reliance, for example through spinning of cotton to produce the home-made cloth khadi. He opposed the system of monopoly capitalism and powerful government, instead supporting village democracy.

However, our aim here is not to assess Gandhi's practice but rather to extract insights from his framework for conceptualizing nonviolent action. This is not so easy. Gandhi expounded his ideas in a vast quantity of writing, but seldom in a systematic, well-organized fashion. It is possible to draw many ideas from his writings, sometimes contradic-

tory ones. Furthermore, Gandhi's "theory of nonviolence" is not necessarily identical to the way nonviolence worked in his own campaigns.

Gandhi's approach included personal nonviolence as a way of life, constructive work, and the use of nonviolence against direct and structural violence. His approach to conflict included a belief that means cannot be separated from ends (good goals do not justify bad methods), a belief in the unity of all life, and a willingness to suffer for one's beliefs.

Gandhi saw nonviolence as a matter of principle: it was a moral necessity. It was necessary because violence, oppression, and exploitation are evils that must be opposed: to tolerate or ignore them is to support them. The best way to challenge evil is by opening the eyes of those who cause it. Violence is not a good method since, as well as causing harm itself, it shuts down the dialogue that is the best way to bring about a change of heart in the oppressor.<sup>5</sup> Nonviolence is a moral necessity because it is the best way to bring about a genuine change in attitude.

In contrast to the Gandhian approach of principled nonviolence is the pragmatic approach, in which nonviolence is preferred because, or when, it is more effective than violence. Most of the other theorists whose work we will examine adopt the pragmatic approach.

Although Gandhi supported nonviolence as a matter of principle, he believed it was the most effective way to bring about beneficial change. However, in undertaking nonviolent action the focus is on carrying out the action in a principled manner, even at the expense of immediate effectiveness. For example, the attitudes of nonviolent activists must be purely moral, and absolutely no violence is allowed. On occasion Gandhi called off major campaigns because of a lapse into violence by some participants.

Underlying Gandhi's approach is an assumption that the commitment and voluntary suffering of nonviolent activists will change

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3 Paul A. Baran, *The Political Economy of Growth* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1957), pp. 144–150.

4 Robert B. Edgerton, *Mau Mau: An African Crucible* (New York: Free Press, 1989). This comparison between British imperialism in India and Kenya was drawn by Robert Burrowes.

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5 If the choice was between doing nothing or using violence, Gandhi preferred violence against evil.



the fundamental attitudes of others, whether it is police beating protesters, rich landowners who exploit those who work their land, or British colonial administrators. This is an assumption about communication: nonviolent action will “melt the hearts” of those supporting evil.

Gandhi saw nonviolent action as a means of fostering dialogue. In any campaign, he would first seek to approach authorities to request that they voluntarily change their policies or behavior. If this was unsuccessful, campaigns of nonviolent action would be launched in order to demonstrate, through the commitment and sacrifice of activists, their strong concern about the issue in question. This was seen by Gandhi as a way of opening the hearts of the oppressors. He was ready to reopen dialogue at any time, often at the expense of a campaign’s momentum and coherence.

For Gandhi, nonviolent action was a search for truth. He introduced the term “satyagraha,” literally “truth-force,” which is often translated as nonviolent action. The idea of truth has come under sustained critical attack in recent decades and would seem to undermine the foundation of Gandhi’s approach.<sup>6</sup>

Communication is central to Gandhi’s approach, which is based on persuading opponents through a moral commitment to a search for truth. Gandhi assumes that persuasion occurs through direct dialogue or observation and that the responsibility for making this happen lies with nonviolent activists, who must be selfless and willing to accept suffering — including beatings, imprisonment, and even death — in support of their beliefs.

We will return in a later section to a discussion of how communication actually operated in some of Gandhi’s campaigns. For now we summarize the strengths and weaknesses of Gandhi’s framework in relation to communication.

A central strength of principled nonviolence is its focus on persuasion via dialogue. Nonviolent action is seen as a means of opening dialogue, by impressing on opponents the commitment and sincerity of activists. Violence is avoided in part because it shuts down dialogue. (At the extreme, a dead opponent cannot be persuaded.) In a search for truth, dialogue is an essential tool. Nonviolent action is a means by which those with less power can open a more balanced dialogue with those with more power. Demanding sacrifice and purity of motive from nonviolent activists minimizes the chance that activists will serve their own interests and oppress others.

A central weakness of principled nonviolence is that it has no framework for conceiving change beyond direct persuasion. When oppressors are far away from the action, for example, it is not obvious how persuasion is supposed to operate. It is well known that crew on military aircraft are far less affected by the remote effects of the bombs they drop than are soldiers by the impact of hand-to-hand combat.<sup>7</sup> It is not immediately obvious how to adapt Gandhi’s framework to deal with bombers and other threats that seem to restrict opportunities for direct persuasion of opponents. This is an increasingly important issue, given that innovations in military technology are distancing victims ever further from the instigators and executors of violence.

The model of principled nonviolence also has no obvious way for dealing with absence of action. If no one is creating dialogue with oppressors through discussion or direct action, then the principled nonviolent activist will simply say that efforts should be made to do so. The theory’s conceptual tools are not well

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6 F. G. Bailey, *The Prevalence of Deceit* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 19–26, argues that Gandhi’s approach is built on the assumption that there is a single truth. Hence, satyagraha contains an unspoken coercive element, in that its adherents believe they have access to this truth and will not compromise until they obtain it. The postmodern view is that there are multiple truths, a perspective compatible with the pragmatic approach to nonviolence discussed in the rest of this chapter.

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7 For an insightful treatment, see Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995).

suited for analyzing why action is not occurring.

## Gene Sharp

We now turn to the pragmatic approach to nonviolent action, which is the most commonly held approach, especially outside India. Pragmatic supporters or users of nonviolent action believe it is superior to violence, either at all times or for a specific campaign or purpose. When social activists use violence, it often alienates supporters and third parties and solidifies opposition. To be seen to use violence against nonviolent resisters can be very damaging. That police resort to using infiltrators (agents provocateurs) to foment violence in dissident movements shows the drawback of being seen to be violent.

However, the distinction between principled and pragmatic approaches to nonviolence is often blurred in practice. Many principled adherents of nonviolence argue that it is pragmatically superior as well, while pragmatic supporters of nonviolence may raise principled objections to violence as a way of building and maintaining adherence to their preferred tactics.

Of all the theorists of nonviolent action since Gandhi, undoubtedly the pivotal figure is Gene Sharp, the world's foremost writer on the subject.<sup>8</sup> Sharp's 1973 epic book *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* is the unrivalled classic in the field.<sup>9</sup> His other books include *Social Power and Political Freedom* and

*Gandhi as a Political Strategist*.<sup>10</sup> He has written other books and numerous articles, given talks around the world, and been a high-profile figure in the field for decades.

Theoretically speaking, Sharp's key role has been to systematize the study of nonviolent action in two ways. First, he classified methods of nonviolent action and catalogued hundreds of different techniques along with an extensive array of historical examples. In *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* Sharp listed 198 different methods of nonviolent action.<sup>11</sup> These include:

- protest and persuasion, such as public statements, slogans, leaflets, banners, demonstrations, marches, disrobings, vigils, mock funerals, teach-ins, and renouncing honors;
- noncooperation, such as ostracism, stay-at-home, protest emigration, consumer boycotts, embargoes, strikes, bans, working to rule, refusal to pay tax or debts, withdrawal of bank deposits, boycotts of government institutions, civil disobedience, evasions, delays, and mock incapability;
- intervention and alternative institutions, such as fasts (a psychological intervention), sit-ins, nonviolent obstructions and occupations, and establishment of alternative institutions for markets, government, transport, media, welfare, health, and education.

For each of the 198 methods of nonviolent action, Sharp listed historical examples. Since his book was published, Sharp has discovered hundreds of additional methods. Sharp's classification has produced conceptual order out of the scattered experiences of and writings on nonviolent action.

Sharp's second pioneering contribution is his consent theory of power, which he uses to

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8 Portions of the following are adapted from Brian Martin, "Gene Sharp's theory of power," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 1989, pp. 213–222. For other assessments of Sharp's work, see Lewis Lipsitz and Herbert M. Kritzer, "Unconventional approaches to conflict resolution: Erikson and Sharp on nonviolence," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 19, No. 4, December 1975, pp. 713–733; Ralph Summy, "One person's search for a functional alternative to violence," *Gandhi Marg*, Vol. 5, No. 1, April 1983, pp. 26–44.

9 Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973).

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10 Gene Sharp, *Gandhi as a Political Strategist* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1979); Gene Sharp, *Social Power and Political Freedom* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1980).

11 Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, pp. 107–445. This is Part Two of the book, sometimes published as a separate volume titled *The Methods of Nonviolent Action*.

explain how nonviolent action works. While Sharp's theory has been given relatively little scholarly attention, it has had an enormous influence among nonviolent activists. In activist circles, it is often taught as part of nonviolent action training, along with such topics as social analysis, group dynamics, consensus decision making, role playing of direct action, and practical information about laws, safety, supplies, and the like. Sharp's theoretical ideas, more than any others, have been incorporated into activist thinking and practice.

The basic ideas of Sharp's theory of power are quite simple:

- people in society may be divided into rulers and subjects;
- the power of rulers derives from consent by the subjects;
- nonviolent action is a process of withdrawing consent and thus is a way to challenge problems of dictatorship, genocide, war, and systems of oppression.

Nonviolent action constitutes a refusal by subjects to obey. The power of the ruler will collapse if consent is withdrawn in an active way. The "active" here is vital. The ruler will not be threatened by grumbling, alienation, or critical analyses alone. Sharp is not concerned with passivity and submissiveness, but instead with activity, challenge, and struggle.

Sharp's consent theory of power provides the theoretical foundation for his analysis of nonviolent action. He analyses the "dynamics of nonviolent action,"<sup>12</sup> which includes:

- laying the groundwork for nonviolent action;
- making challenges, which usually brings on repression;
- building solidarity and discipline to oppose repression;
- building support;

- achieving success by conversion, accommodation, or nonviolent coercion;
- redistributing power.

For Gandhi, nonviolence was a moral imperative. For Sharp, nonviolence is a pragmatic imperative: by withdrawing consent and using the powerful dynamics of nonviolent action, major problems including dictatorship, war, genocide, and systems of oppression can be challenged and transformed. Sharp aims to provide a solid, indeed exhaustive, treatment of nonviolent action, demonstrating its superiority to violent methods, in order to convince people, including political and military leaders, to adopt it. However, neither scholars, politicians, nor military commanders have rushed to follow Sharp, whose ideas have been adopted to a far greater extent by social activists.<sup>13</sup>

Sharp's model is individualistic and voluntaristic. These characteristics provide both its greatest strength and its greatest weakness.

By focusing on withdrawal of consent, Sharp's theory of power provides a framework for activists that is simple, congenial, and empowering. It implies that anyone can contribute to opposing repression and oppression: the means are at hand, namely symbolic actions, noncooperation, intervention, and setting up alternative institutions. Since the key is withdrawing consent, action can be taken by anyone and begin at any time. Sharp's analysis of the dynamics of nonviolent action provides a way of understanding the evolution of campaigns, in which nonviolent action provides the tools for challenge and eventual transformation of oppressive systems.

Actual campaigns can be readily analyzed using Sharp's framework of the dynamics of nonviolent action. Consider the case of 1998 Indonesian popular opposition to the Suharto regime.

*Laying the groundwork for nonviolent action.* There had always been critics of the

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12 Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, pp. 447–814. This is Part Three of the book, sometimes published as a separate volume titled *The Dynamics of Nonviolent Action*.

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13 This is ironic, given Sharp's attempts to distance civilian-based defense from groups such as pacifists, feminists, and environmentalists.

regime, but due to repression and divide-and-rule techniques, they had been weak and isolated. With the economic downturn, opposition groups became emboldened.

*Making challenges, which usually brings on repression.* Student protests, the most visible sign of opposition, were met by armed force.

*Building solidarity and discipline to oppose repression.* Students maintained nonviolent discipline. They took stringent measures to keep out infiltrators who might have provoked violence to discredit the student protest.

*Building support.* When four students were killed in one protest, this caused a dramatic backlash against the government, demonstrating the importance of “political jiu-jitsu” in which violence by the regime is used by its nonviolent opponents to generate greater resistance.

*Achieving success by conversion, accommodation, or nonviolent coercion.* A few members of the elite were persuaded about the need for change. Others supported limited change to protect their positions, a form of accommodation. Suharto himself was essentially coerced, using nonviolent means, to resign.

*Redistributing power.*<sup>14</sup> The nonviolent struggle against the regime built self-esteem in the opposition movement and reduced centralization of political power.

Empowerment of activists is a feature of nonviolent action whether undertaken on a principled or pragmatic basis. This occurs

through the experience of collective action, especially when the process is participatory and when the action is direct. In participatory actions, those involved gain skills in group dynamics, decision-making, and mutual support, whereas hierarchical processes can perpetuate dependence. In direct action — such as attending a banned meeting, working-in at a workplace, or squatting in a vacant building — participants themselves help achieve a goal, whereas in much conventional citizen action, such as voting, lobbying, writing to politicians, or holding protest meetings, the aim is to get someone else, such as politicians or administrators, to take action. Although Sharp and others recognize these empowering effects of nonviolent action on participants, most of their attention has been on the effects on opponents.<sup>15</sup>

The individualistic and voluntaristic features of Sharp’s model are also a weakness. The model works best when applied to systems where the distinction between ruler and subjects is most obvious and accentuated, such as military dictatorships. It does not work nearly so well when applied to oppressive systems in which people are embedded in complex relationships, sometimes as subordinates and sometimes as superordinates. For example, in most large organizations, such as corporations and government departments, many employees are both bosses to their subordinates and subordinates to their own bosses. Many workers have multiple roles, having different degrees and types of power depending on whether they are dealing with clients or other workers. Consumers in the marketplace are implicated in a complex system of exchange in which the power exercised by sellers and buyers often varies from transaction to transaction. Only a very few managers or capitalists could unambiguously be said to be rulers, whereas nearly everyone else is sometimes more a “ruler” and sometimes more a “subject.” Patriarchy, the

14 Sharp’s discussion of the redistribution of power (*The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, pp. 777–810) is very general and does not discuss the sorts of structural changes common in literature on revolution. However, other writers on nonviolence give more attention to revolutionary transformations of social structures through nonviolent action: George Lakey, *Strategy for a Living Revolution* (New York: Grossman, 1974); Brian Martin, *Uprooting War* (London: Freedom Press, 1984); Martin Oppenheimer, *The Urban Guerilla* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1969); Geoffrey Ostergaard, *Nonviolent Revolution in India* (New Delhi: Gandhi Peace Foundation, 1985).

15. Julia Kraft and Andreas Speck, “Nonviolence and social empowerment,” <http://www.wri-irg.org/nvse/nvse-2.htm>, translated from an article in *Gewaltfreie Aktion*, Vol. 32, No. 123, 2000.

system of male domination, is similarly complex in its power relationships, so that the ruler-subject distinction provides little conceptual leverage.<sup>16</sup> When dealing with complex systems of power, the idea of subjects withdrawing consent from rulers does not provide nearly as much useful guidance as in cases where there are obvious rulers. This can be illustrated by using Sharp's framework to examine the anti-MAI campaign.

*Laying the groundwork for nonviolent action.* Analysis of globalization initiatives and building of networks were the most effective means of preparation

*Making challenges, which usually brings on repression.* The challenge was primarily by mobilizing popular opinion against the MAI. Repression against opponents of the MAI did not play a significant role.

*Building solidarity and discipline to oppose repression.* Since repression was never a major factor, this stage is not very relevant.

*Building support.* Winning over unconverted parties was vital to the anti-MAI campaign, but the role of "political jiu-jitsu," in which third parties are outraged by repression, was minimal.

*Achieving success by conversion, accommodation, or nonviolent coercion.* Conversion, accommodation, and coercion all played a role.

*Redistributing power.* The campaign helped to prevent a redistribution of power to multinational corporations.

Because the ruler-subject dichotomy is not so obviously applicable to capitalism as a system of power, Sharp's model of the dynamics of nonviolent action provides less insight into the operation of the anti-MAI campaign than into the campaign against the Suharto regime.<sup>17</sup>

More generally, it appears that Sharp's model works best when applied to systems of *repression*, where overt physical violence is a prominent means of maintaining unequal power, and is less helpful for analyzing systems of *oppression*, where overt violence is less salient. Ironically, the concept of hegemony is commonly deployed in explaining the persistence of oppressive systems, and hegemony essentially involves people believing in or acquiescing to a way of doing things that does not best serve their own real interests.<sup>18</sup> While consent — or some related process of psychological adjustment — may be involved in hegemony, the problem is that *withdrawal of consent* is more problematical when power relations are not neatly captured by a ruler-subject dichotomy.

In summary, as a general theory of power, consent theory has serious weaknesses, but as a theory of withdrawal of consent to challenge repression, it has enormous strengths.

Concerning absence of action, Sharp's framework gives little help. His major works focus almost entirely on nonviolent action, with relatively little attention to explaining why action might not be occurring, except when he examines obedience, a central concept in his theory of power: "the most important single quality of any government, without which it would not exist, must be the obedience and submission of its subjects. Obedience is at the heart of political power."<sup>19</sup> He suggests that there is no single answer to the question of why people obey, but that habit, fear of sanctions, moral obligation, self-interest, psychological identification with the ruler, zones of indifference, and absence of

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reasonably well, whereas the case of global corporate domination does not.

18 On hegemony, see Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971). The idea of hegemony usually implies false consciousness, namely that people do not fully realize their real interests. For an argument against this, see James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

19 Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, p. 16.

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16 Kate McGuinness, "Gene Sharp's theory of power: a feminist critique of consent," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 30, No. 1, 1993, pp. 101–115.

17 Of our three case studies, the Indonesian and Soviet cases fit Sharp's ruler-subject model

self-confidence among subjects are important. A major weakness is that these explanations are at the level of individual psychology. The interaction of psychology with social systems such as capitalism and patriarchy is absent from Sharp's model.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, Sharp does not analyze systems of communication such as the mass media.

In summary, Sharp's analysis of the dynamics of nonviolent action is excellent for examining immediate struggles such as the resistance to the Soviet coup, but is far less effective for dealing with systems such as capitalism in which people are enmeshed in complex webs of power. By focusing on withdrawal of consent, Sharp's framework is tremendously empowering to activists but provides little guidance for explaining the absence of action.

### **Social defense**

So far we have discussed nonviolent action as a general-purpose method, typically used by social activists to oppose social problems such as racism, male domination, environmentally damaging practices, war, and economic exploitation. It is also possible to imagine nonviolent action used in a more systematically organized fashion as an alternative to military defense. Instead of relying on military forces for defense, a community would instead defend itself using rallies, strikes, boycotts, sit-ins, alternative institutions, and many other methods of noncooperation. This alternative to military defense goes by many names, including nonviolent defense, social defense, civilian defense, civilian-based defense, and defense by civil resistance.<sup>21</sup> We normally use the term social defense here.

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20 On the psychology of oppression, see Philip Lichtenberg, *Community and Confluence: Undoing the Clinch of Oppression* (Cleveland: Gestalt Institute of Cleveland Press, 1994).

21 It is important to distinguish social defense from civil defense, which is protection against military attack, for example using gas masks and bomb shelters. A social defense system might include civil defense preparations, but the essence

At first glance, it might seem that social defense is an absolutely hopeless proposition. How can rallies, strikes, and the like deter or defeat an armed aggressor? That this is so difficult to imagine shows how deeply the military model has penetrated standard ways of thinking. The very word "defense" in conventional discussions is taken to imply military defense. Furthermore, the word "defense" usually implies the capacity for (military) offense too. Decades ago, before euphemisms became so standard, what are now called departments of defense were called departments of war.

Social defense operates not by conquering an opponent but by undermining it. This can happen at several locations. Invading or occupying soldiers are more easily mobilized against a violent resistance. Nonviolent resistance is more likely to weaken their resolve or even win them over. This was apparent in the resistance to the Soviet coup, when some soldiers resisted orders to attack.

A second location for resistance is the population of the attacking or occupying country. A government normally finds it far easier to mobilize popular support for military action against an armed opponent than against an unarmed one. As already noted, the British colonialists ruling Kenya could use prison camps and torture with relative impunity against the armed resistance, whereas the colonial government in India felt more constrained, with the nonviolent resistance having generated support from British people.

Yet another location for resistance is among people in other parts of the world, aside from the two countries that are involved in the "war." Concerned citizens can exert pressure via a range of channels, for example through churches, trade unions, governments, nongovernment organizations, and direct contact. The Palestinian intifada, an unarmed struggle against Israeli occupiers from 1987 to 1993, was far more successful in gaining international support than terrorism by the Palestinian Liberation Organization had been previously.

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of social defense is nonviolent resistance by civilians.

Arguably, a completely nonviolent struggle, avoiding the throwing of stones, might well have been even more effective in stimulating support.<sup>22</sup>

In terms of Sharp's theory of power, social defense relies on systematic withdrawal of consent as a comprehensive strategy to deter and undermine aggression: consent of soldiers, consent of citizens of the aggressor state, and consent of people around the world.

No country has ever adopted social defense as a matter of policy, except as a small supplement to military defense. Therefore, in historical terms, there is no firm evidence of its viability and effectiveness. The cases that give the closest approximation to social defense in operation are the 1923 German resistance to French and Belgian occupation and the 1968 Czechoslovak resistance to the Warsaw Pact invasion. In neither of these cases was there any preparation or training. To assess social defense by using these cases would be like assessing military defense by using a case of spontaneous armed resistance in which there was no planning or preparation, no training, and no special equipment.

Social defense, as a policy option, could require just as much planning, preparation, training, and investment as military defense. Possible threats would be investigated and plans made for countering them. People would participate in training, which might include nonviolent discipline, decision-making, communication systems, and many other skills. Preparations could include setting up self-reliant systems for energy, agriculture, water supply, and transport, so that enemies could not shut them down by attack or sabotage. It could include learning foreign languages and customs in order to communicate effectively with people in other parts of the world. It could include establishing links with pro-democracy groups in potential aggressor countries. It could include setting up

multiple systems for communication, such as e-mail, telephone, and short-wave radio. It could include education in how opinion can be manipulated by appeals to racism and xenophobia, and how to counter this.

Social defense does not mean just dispensing with military defense and then just refusing to cooperate with an aggressor. Rather, to have a reasonable chance of success, it must be as carefully and systematically organized as military defense but in a very different manner. Military forces are only the tip of the iceberg of a military defense system, which also includes such things as economic infrastructure, arms manufacture, military bases, spy operations, education and training, alliances, training exercises, and public opinion formation and manipulation. Similarly, methods of nonviolent action such as strikes and boycotts are just the visible manifestations of a social defense system, which would have an analogous set of social and technological supports.

While social defense has quite a number of structural similarities to military defense, there are some fundamental differences, of which the absence of violence is just the most obvious. Another important difference is that social defense is, by necessity, people's defense. Military forces involve only a small proportion of the population. In rich countries, many armies are now largely professional, with little or no reliance on conscription.<sup>23</sup> Social defense, to be successful, must have widespread support — though not necessarily universal backing — and a high level of popular participation. (It is sometimes called "popular nonviolent defense" for this reason.) Most soldiers in most countries are young fit men. Participation in nonviolent resistance, in comparison, can readily involve women, people with disabilities, children, and the elderly. Nearly every sector of the population

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22 Souad R. Dajani, *Eyes Without Country: Searching for a Palestinian Strategy of Liberation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995); Andrew Rigby, *Living the Intifada* (London: Zed Books, 1991).

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23 Economic pressures and discrimination in employment may result in a form of de facto conscription, typically of those who are poor or in ethnic minorities.

can participate in methods such as rallies, strikes, and boycotts.<sup>24</sup>

Military defense is normally taken to be defense of a state. The well-known definition by classic sociologist Max Weber is that a state is a set of social institutions based on a monopoly, within a territory, over the legitimate use of force.<sup>25</sup> The “legitimate” force is exercised by the police and the military, which are the ultimate defenders of the state. If social defense is a direct replacement for military defense, then social defense is also a defense of the state, though with such an alternative the definition of the state becomes problematic, given that the legitimate use of force within a territory is no longer such a defining characteristic. In conventional parlance, states are identified with countries, such as Angola, Germany, and Peru, so social defense could be taken to be defense of the country and its people from aggression or repression.

However, a broader interpretation of social defense sees it as defense of a “community,” namely a group of people with a conception of itself as having certain common interests. Communities are often geographically defined, but they could be narrower or wider than countries. Furthermore, communities can also be defined nongeographically, such as a social class, religious group, political group, or ethnic group.

As noted earlier, systems for military defense commonly can be used for military

attack. Soldiers can defend or attack, and likewise weapons such as rifles, tanks, bombers, and missiles have dual capacities. One school of (military) defense thinking advocates “nonoffensive defense” or “defensive defense”: weapons with offensive capacities, such as bombers, and long-range missiles, are eschewed, with emphasis on technologies that are mainly useful for defense, such as fighter aircraft, short-range missiles, and fortifications. The aim of defensive defense is to reduce the threat perceived by potential enemies and thus reduce the likelihood of being attacked. Social defense takes this process one step further, at least as regards weapons systems. Because there are no weapons, there is absolutely no capacity for military attack, and thus potential enemies can be reassured that there is no military threat.

However, social defense can include the capacity for nonviolent offense or attack.<sup>26</sup> This could involve attempts to undermine a foreign government or reverse one of its policies, for example by building links with foreign opposition movements, distributing information via e-mail, sending nonviolent change agents as visitors, and coordinating international pressure through letter-writing, boycotts, fasts, and rallies.<sup>27</sup> Social defense is limited if it means only preparing for defense and leaving potential aggressors to prepare an assault. By supplementing social defense with social attack, potential aggressors may be undermined before their preparations become dangerous.

Australian military defense thinking has long included preparation to deal with the “Indonesian threat,” namely the potential for military attack from Indonesia. The assumption is that Australia needs military defense to defend against this threat. Social defense for Australia would involve preparations for

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24 On participation by people with disabilities, see Brian Martin and Wendy Varney, “Nonviolent action and people with disabilities,” *Civilian-Based Defense*, Vol. 15, No. 3, Year-End 2000, pp. 4–17. While nearly everyone can participate in many types of nonviolent action, there are limits to and differences in participation depending on the method and group involved. For example, some risky methods, such as swimming or kayaking in front of a ship, require high levels of fitness and alertness.

25 This definition is not quite accurate since, in most states, male violence against women within marriage, and some other contexts, is legal and thus considered “legitimate” by the state.

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26 In English, the expression “social offense” implies a breach of propriety, so “social attack” perhaps better conveys what is involved here.

27 Brian Martin, “Revolutionary social defence,” *Bulletin of Peace Proposals*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 1991, pp. 97–105.



nonviolent resistance to any attack from Indonesia, but also involve support for prodemocracy forces in Indonesia. Ironically, the Australian government has given considerable support to the Indonesian military, thus fostering the foreign military capacity that provides the rationale for having Australian military forces.

The anti-MAI campaign can be conceived of as a form of social defense against an assault by the capitalist class. Antiglobalists could take the attack in any of a number of ways, for example by campaigns to undermine the loyalty of employees of transnational corporations.

Military defense is normally justified as necessary for defending against attack, but what good is military defense when there is a military coup? There are numerous coups and attempted coups around the world every year, not to mention military dictatorships. Indeed, military forces are more likely to be used against their own people than against a foreign enemy. Militaries are central to the power of the state and are used against both internal and external threats. A coup is a change of the guard of the state elite. It does not change the system of state power, though it may have serious ramifications for the population.

Social defense provides a ready solution to the problem of coups: since there is no military, there can be no military coups. Furthermore, since social defense by necessity must be based on widespread support, a nonviolent coup could be readily challenged through popular action.

The radical implications of social defense become apparent here. By preparing a population to be able to use a variety of methods of nonviolent action against aggression and repression, the population is given the skills to use those same methods against others: unpopular laws, exploitative employers, elite corruption, and unjust privilege. A population equipped with the capacity for nonviolent struggle is one that can take on any government or powerful interest group. In comparison, military and police forces are used, for the most part, to support ruling groups, often in the face of popular opposition.

Social defense is not a guarantee of just behavior, since nonviolent action can be used for unjust purposes, for example when a dominant ethnic group uses ostracism against minorities. Though both violent and nonviolent action can be used for just and unjust purposes, there is an asymmetry in their application. The consequences of violence are usually far more severe (and often permanent, in the case of killing), participation in violence is far more limited, and violence is more readily used by elite groups to protect their interests. Some of the most serious problems, including war and genocide, cannot be undertaken using social defense.

Prior to the 1950s, a number of writers, of whom the most well known names are Bertrand Russell and Gandhi, suggested that militaries could be replaced by nonviolent resistance. However, it was not until 1958, with the publication of Stephen King-Hall's book *Defense in the Nuclear Age*, that social defense was presented systematically as a full-scale alternative.<sup>28</sup> A number of other authors have made important contributions, such as Theodor Ebert, Johan Galtung and Stephen King-Hall.<sup>29</sup> In order to proceed with our

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28 Stephen King-Hall, *Defence in the Nuclear Age* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1958).

29 Anders Boserup and Andrew Mack, *War Without Weapons: Non-violence in National Defence* (London: Frances Pinter, 1974); Robert J. Burrowes, *The Strategy of Nonviolent Defense: A Gandhian Approach* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996); Giliam de Valk in cooperation with Johan Niezing, *Research on Civilian-Based Defence* (Amsterdam: SISWO, 1993); Theodor Ebert, *Gewaltfreier Aufstand: Alternative zum Bürgerkrieg [Nonviolent Insurrection: Alternative to Civil War]* (Freiburg: Rombach, 1968); Gustaaf Geeraerts (ed.), *Possibilities of Civilian Defence in Western Europe* (Amsterdam: Swets and Zeitlinger, 1977); Bradford Lyttle, *National Defense Thru Nonviolent Resistance* (Chicago, IL: Shahn-ti Sena, 1958); Brian Martin, *Social Defence, Social Change* (London: Freedom Press, 1993); Johan Niezing, *Sociale Verdediging als Logisch Alternatief: Van Utopie naar Optie [Social Defense as a Logical Alternative: From Utopia Towards Option]* (Assen, Netherlands: Van

examination of nonviolence and communication, we analyze the works of a few social defense theorists.

### Conditions for the success of social defense?

In 1982, the Netherlands government commissioned a report on social defense from the State University of Leiden. A few years later, the report, a book entitled *Social Defence and Soviet Military Power*, was published; the lead author was Alex P. Schmid.<sup>30</sup> Its conclusion is that social defense would not be a viable method to oppose a Soviet invasion, then the threat considered most likely in Western Europe. The book is perhaps the most carefully argued case against social defense ever produced and hence is worthy of consideration.<sup>31</sup>

The book contains four parts. The first is a short survey of concepts of nonviolence and social defense. The second is a major study of Soviet military interventions and nuclear threats since 1945, including conflicts within the Soviet bloc, conflicts between the Soviet Union and the West, and Soviet involvement in Third World conflicts.

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Gorcum, 1987); Michael Randle, *Civil Resistance* (London: Fontana, 1994); Adam Roberts (ed.), *The Strategy of Civilian Defence: Non-violent Resistance to Aggression* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967); Gene Sharp, *Making Europe Unconquerable: The Potential of Civilian-based Deterrence and Defense* (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger, 1985); Gene Sharp with the assistance of Bruce Jenkins, *Civilian-Based Defense: A Post-Military Weapons System* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

30 Alex P. Schmid, with E. Berends and L. Zonneveld, *Social Defence and Soviet Military Power: An Inquiry into the Relevance of an Alternative Defence Concept* (Leiden: Center for the Study of Social Conflict, State University of Leiden, 1985).

31 Portions of this section are adapted from a review of *Social Defence and Soviet Military Power* by Brian Martin, *Civilian-Based Defense: News & Opinion*, Vol. 4, No. 4, May 1988, pp. 6–11.

The third part presents four East European case studies: Lithuanian resistance against Soviet reoccupation (1944 to about 1952), East Germany 1953, Hungary 1956, and Czechoslovakia 1968. In each case, the events are compared with ten “conditions” for social defense to infer whether social defense would have been more successful than the resistance that actually occurred.

The final part of the book looks at social defense as part of a more comprehensive defense system, examines Sweden’s psychological defense, and presents resource mobilization theory (used by social scientists to analyze social movements) as an alternative to the social defense perspective.

Schmid’s basic conclusion is that social defense would not work against a Soviet invasion because the Soviet government was mostly immune to persuasion, publicity, and economic pressures: “the Soviet military power instrument cannot be balanced by economic noncooperation and cultural persuasion alone as the USSR is economically invulnerable and culturally impenetrable. It can be matched only by military power.”<sup>32</sup>

With the benefit of hindsight — namely, the collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern European communist regimes, largely without outside pressure<sup>33</sup> — it is easy to criticize this conclusion. The Soviet Union had serious internal weaknesses, few of which were ever exploited by opponents in the West, as we argued in chapter 3. In spite of this, it is useful to examine *Social Defence and Soviet Military Power* in order to see what insights can be gleaned. In this case negative insights, namely knowledge that certain approaches are unfruitful, may be of greater interest.

An important point made in the study is that the outcome of many struggles, whether violent or nonviolent, depends only in a limited fashion on the methods used and the strength of the resistance. At least as important

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32 Schmid, p. 209.

33 Ralph Summy and Michael E. Salla (eds.), *Why the Cold War Ended: A Range of Interpretations* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995).

is the wider configuration of power internationally. For example, the Lithuanian partisans never had much of a chance without the West coming to their aid. This was only likely in the context of a World War Three, which is what many of them hoped for; with the conclusion of the Korean war, their remaining hopes for and illusions about Western support were dashed.

Schmid presents ten conditions that must be satisfied in order for social defense to be a viable option.<sup>34</sup>

1. There must be an organization or movement to promote nonviolent resistance.

2. The community being defended must have a degree of independence for the purpose of preparing for defense.

3. The defenders must be able to communicate with each other, with third parties, and with the attacker (including the attacker's community).

4. Resistance is aided by a tradition of democracy and diffusion of political power.

5. The political system of the defenders must have greater legitimacy than the political system of the attackers.

6. The defending community must have a high level of social cohesion.

7. The attacker must be dependent, to some extent, on the defenders or on an ally of the defenders.

8. Interaction must be possible between individual attackers and defenders.

9. The community being defended must have some legitimacy with public opinion, foreign governments, or the attacker.

10. The attacker "must be rational and not permanently fanatical or crazy."

Many of these conditions seem to be common sense. Condition 3 is especially relevant to our interest in communication. But whether they are sensible as a means of judging whether social defense is a viable option is another question. The value of the ten

conditions is weakened by Schmid's assumptions about the nature of social defense.

First, he assumes that social defense is national defense that would occur in one country (the Netherlands) without accompanying changes in other countries. The Soviet military threat, which is his prime concern, would remain a potent one in this circumstance. An alternative is to see the introduction of social defense as a part of a process that transcends national boundaries, leading to change in the Soviet Union as well as the Netherlands and other countries.

Second, Schmid assumes that social defense has no offensive capacity. As noted earlier, nonviolent attack is certainly possible, for example through radio broadcasts, visits by activists, boycotts, and interventions by peace brigades.

Third, Schmid assumes that social defense must substitute for all the strengths of military defense, including withstanding a Soviet invasion. He makes little mention of the failures of military approaches, nor of the capabilities of social defense that are not possible using violent methods. The dangers of military coups, attacks on civil liberties, militarization of the economy, and weapons of mass destruction are not attributed to military approaches but rather accepted as parts of the present world order. For example, Schmid notes that social defense provides no defense against nuclear attack; he thinks that a nuclear deterrent is essential. This ignores the fact that possessing nuclear weapons is precisely what is most likely to make one a nuclear target and to stimulate the "enemy" towards building its own nuclear weapons.

Fourth, Schmid assumes that social defense would be introduced without any other significant changes in society. He presents social defense as a sort of "social fix," a pragmatic alternative to the present system. Yet the vulnerability of a society to attack or takeover depends on more than just formal defense measures. For example, decentralized energy systems are less vulnerable than centralized ones. A society that systematically opposes racism, sexism, and large inequalities in wealth is less vulnerable than one split along

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34 Schmid, pp. 27–29. The conditions have been liberally rewritten from their original rather technical mode of expression, with the intention of maintaining their spirit.

these lines. Factories controlled by workers are less vulnerable than ones controlled by owners or bureaucrats.

Schmid's negative conclusions about social defense reflect the very restrictive assumptions he makes about its implementation. One insight that can be drawn from his study is that social defense, to be effective, cannot be just a narrow replacement for military defense. In particular,

- introducing social defense ideally should be part of a global process, rather than an exercise of "nonviolence in one country";
- social defense is best supplemented by social attack;
- social defense has a qualitatively different set of strengths and weaknesses than military defense;
- introducing social defense involves considerable social change outside the strict ambit of what is commonly thought of as defense issues.

It is worth noting that the option of defense by military forces is never assessed according to "conditions" before deciding whether to use it as a defense option; rather, military defense is unquestioningly assumed to be required, and a military system is set up to be as effective as possible within constraints such as resources and social values. If social defense is a fundamentally different option — as we have argued — then it does not make sense to "choose" it according to whether it satisfies a set of criteria that take military success as the standard.

Consider the converse process. Take the virtues of social defense as the standard and establish a set of criteria that military defense (or some other defense system) must satisfy before being considered a viable option. Here, we note a few possibilities of special interest:

1. The defense system must reflect its goals in its methods.
2. The defense system must be internally democratic.
3. The defense system must pose a low threat to other democratic societies.
4. The defense system must not be a threat to the society it is intended to defend.

5. The attacker "must be rational and not permanently fanatical or crazy."

Other conditions could be specified if desired, including many of Schmid's conditions which could be imported without change. Military defense fails on all five of these counts. Specifically:

1. The stated goal of military defense is peace, but its methods are war and the threat of violence.
2. Military forces are internally autocratic rather than democratic.
3. Military preparations threaten other societies.
4. Military forces can be used against the society they are ostensibly intended to defend.
5. Military defense is not very effective against "permanently fanatical or crazy" opponents. For example, nuclear weapons can be smuggled into a country in a suitcase, with military interdiction all but powerless to stop this short of a total blockade of commerce. Agents from an enemy can deploy biological or radiological weapons with relative ease, for example by releasing them via the air conditioning system of a large office building. Enemy agents who are or become members of the armed forces can use a military's weapons against itself.<sup>35</sup>

### **Social defense strategy**

Rather than assess social defense by a set of conditions, an alternative is to choose social

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<sup>35</sup> Schmid's assumption in talking about permanently fanatical or crazy opponents is that they are commanders of foreign states who use conventional military methods. An alternative assumption is that nonconventional methods are used. Any society that relies on dangerous technologies for defense or other purposes — such as risky nuclear or biological materials — could find that they are used against it. For example, a few "crazy" opponents could make it their aim to spend however many years is necessary to gain employment in a nuclear or biological facility and then cause a major "accident" of Chernobyl or greater proportions.

defense because it is compatible with social values and aspirations and then to develop it to be as effective as possible. We examine here some key studies that focus on social defense strategy.

Stephen King-Hall, in his pioneering book *Defense in the Nuclear Age*, asked what was being defended by social defense.<sup>36</sup> His answer was “a way of life.” This is quite different from military systems which aim primarily to defend territory, plus troops, matériel, civilians, and the like. By “a way of life,” King-Hall primarily meant British parliamentary democracy. Although people may reasonably have differences about what is worth defending, the idea of defending a way of life captures the essence of social defense, which can be said to be defense of the social fabric. Resisters of the 1991 Soviet coup were defending only some aspects — and fairly recent ones — of their way of life, but there was nevertheless considerable resolve about the worth of defending them.

Thinking about the fundamental features of a society is helpful for focusing on what people really should be defending, but it provides little guidance for actually organizing and running the defense. For this, it is useful to turn to studies of social defense strategy.

A key work in the field is *War Without Weapons: Non-Violence in National Defence* by Anders Boserup and Andrew Mack. The book describes the methods of civilian defense — classified as symbolic, denial, and undermining activities — and analyzes organizational issues, especially coordination of the resistance and the appropriate role for its leadership. The authors analyze two classic cases of nonviolent resistance to occupation — Germany in 1923 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 — and two classic cases of nonviolent resistance to military coups — the 1920 Kapp putsch and the 1961 Algerian Generals’ Revolt.

*War Without Weapons* contains two innovative discussions of special note. The first is a comparison of social defense with guerrilla

warfare. These are different, of course, in that guerrilla warfare uses violence (as well as nonviolent means). However, in certain respects there are considerable similarities, notably the requirement to wage struggle against an opponent that has overwhelming superiority in armed force in a situation where there may be no secure haven for launching attacks. Like social defense, guerrilla warfare generally relies on support from the society.

The most important contribution by Boserup and Mack is their discussion of strategy, drawing on the classical contribution by Clausewitz.<sup>37</sup> One major element of Clausewitz’s theory is the concept of the center of gravity, namely the opponent’s central source of strength, which should be the main target for destruction. The center of gravity of the defense is determined by the mode of defense, which is the basis for Clausewitz’s idea of the superiority of the defense over the offense. Working out the center of gravity is important since it should be the basis for designing campaigns, choosing tactics, building alliances, and many other aspects of the defense system.

Boserup and Mack conclude that for a social defense system, the center of gravity is the unity of the resistance: “It is against this point that the whole thrust of the attack must be directed and to its preservation that all efforts of the defense must tend.”<sup>38</sup> If the defense is able to absorb the attack, then its next task is to mount a counterattack against the center of gravity of the opponent. Boserup and Mack say that in the case of military attack against a social defense system, the center of gravity of the offense depends on the mode of attack. Generally speaking, the center of gravity for the counteroffensive will be those things that allow the offense to continue, such as the willingness of troops to exercise repression, political support in their home

36 King-Hall, *Defence in the Nuclear Age*.

37 Carl von Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege [On War]* (Berlin: Ferdinand Dümmler, 1832).

38 Boserup and Mack, *War Without Weapons*, p. 163.

country for the leaders of the offense, and international support or noninterference.<sup>39</sup>

Other social defense theorists have built on Boserup and Mack's analysis but differed about the precise nature of the center of gravity. Gene Keyes, who made a major study of the Danish nonviolent resistance to the Nazi occupation during World War II, decided that the center of gravity should be maintaining the morale of the resistance.<sup>40</sup> Keyes summarizes his position thus: "I suggest that the center of gravity might better be identified — for the aggressor and defender alike — as *morale*. Let unity be impaired if it comes to that. But let the parties bearing the burden of defense carry on with morale unshaken, and national integrity will remain intact. If unity frays, let it be; I would not admit defeat. But if morale collapses, all is over: for us if it's our morale; for them if it's theirs."<sup>41</sup>

A different center of gravity is identified by Robert Burrowes in his book *The Strategy of Nonviolence Defense: A Gandhian Approach*, a major contribution to the field.<sup>42</sup> It presents a closely argued and highly principled perspective, beginning with a critique of classical ideas about strategy and culminating in several chapters laying out strategy of nonviolent defense.

In Burrowes' framework, the political purpose of nonviolent defense is "to create the policy, process, structural, and systemic conditions that will satisfy human needs." Within this general purpose, there are two

strategic aims, one each for the defense and for the counteroffensive. For the defense, the strategic aim is "to consolidate the power and will of the defending population to resist the aggression."<sup>43</sup> This includes mobilization of "key social groups" including worker organizations, women's groups, religious bodies, and ethnic communities.

This might sound deceptively easy but it has significant implications. For example, in choosing whether to hold mass rallies, the key thing is not how many people will attend, whether there will be media coverage, or whether police and troops are likely to use violence, but whether the action will strengthen the power and will of the population. Burrowes traces the consequences of his general framework through a range of areas, including the time frame of the struggle, communication with the opponent, selection of nonviolent tactics, secrecy, sabotage, maintaining nonviolent discipline, and making defenders less vulnerable in the face of an extremely ruthless opponent.

Parallel to the strategic aim of the defense is the strategic aim of the counteroffensive: "to *alter* the will of the opponent elite to conduct the aggression, and to *undermine* their power to do so." This has three components. First is altering the will of the troops of the opponent elite. In the case of the Palestinian intifada, for example, this would mean winning over Israeli troops or at least weakening their commitment to serve the repression. Throwing rocks at them is less likely to achieve this than engaging them in dialogue and demonstrating Palestinian commitment. The second component is altering "the will of key social groups who support the opponent elite's act of aggression."<sup>44</sup> For the intifada to be effective, it was necessary to undermine support within Israel for the Israeli occupation. The third component is altering the will of allies of the opponent elite. For the intifada, this means, for

39 Boserup and Mack, *War Without Weapons*, p. 169.

40. Gene Keyes, "Strategic non-violent defense: the construct of an option," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2, June 1981, pp. 125–151.

41 Keyes, "Strategic non-violent defense," p. 133. Emphasis in the original.

42. Robert J. Burrowes, *The Strategy of Nonviolence Defense: A Gandhian Approach* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996). Portions of the following discussion are adapted from Brian Martin, "Nonviolent defence: Robert Burrowes' approach," *Nonviolence Today*, No. 55, July/August 1997, pp. 19–22.

43 Burrowes, *The Strategy of Nonviolence Defense*, p. 209.

44 Burrowes, *The Strategy of Nonviolence Defense*, p. 209. Emphasis in the original.

example, challenging the support given to Israel by the US government.<sup>45</sup>

Burrowes' formulation of the political purpose and strategic aims of nonviolent defense has two components: will and power. This can be most easily understood in relation to the counteroffensive. One component of this is altering the commitment of opponent troops to their assigned tasks. If their commitment or "will" can be altered, then the opponent cannot succeed, except by bringing in other troops. But even if the troops remain committed to their tasks, they can be nonviolently coerced. This is the factor of "power." For example, in the 1986 "people power" revolution in the Philippines, some soldiers were won over to the resistance by talking with people opposed to the dictatorship — undermining their will — whereas others were primarily influenced by the massive demonstration — undermining their power.

Approaches to nonviolence can be divided along two axes: principled versus pragmatic and revolutionary versus reformist. Gandhi's nonviolence was principled and revolutionary. Many other writers on social defense, such as Gene Sharp, are better described as pragmatic and reformist. They justify nonviolence on the basis of its effectiveness — the pragmatic approach — and they see nonviolent defense primarily as a way to defend society as it exists — the reformist approach. Burrowes strongly criticizes non-Gandhian approaches. He criticizes Sharp's approach for being based on a faulty strategic theory (the indirect approach of Liddell Hart, subject of a critique earlier in Burrowes' book), for relying on a conception of society oriented to elites, and for failing to focus on satisfying human needs.

Burrowes' approach is principled and revolutionary, and perhaps his sort of principled nonviolence is inevitably revolutionary. Although the title of the book uses the word "defense," this is not national defense the way most people think of it. It is more akin to

nonviolent revolution.

Social defense strategy is a vital topic, worthy of much further study and practical development. However, communication is our central concern here. Although communication is an essential requirement for social defense, the discussions by Boserup and Mack, Keyes, and Burrowes give little explicit attention to it. The vital role of communication is implicit in the center of gravity of a social defense system, which these authors variously conclude to be the unity, morale, or will/power of the defenders. For any of these — unity, morale, or will/power — communication is obviously essential, especially among the resisters, in order to provide mutual support, overcome appeals and propaganda from the opponent, coordinate actions, maintain contact with third parties, support maximum participation in decision making and action, and prevent divisive internal splits and divide-and-rule tactics.

In discussing strategy, these authors assume a basic level of communication and do not focus on what can make that communication more or less effective. This may reflect an assumption that a social defense system is "up and running," with full popular support, and that the main task is dealing with the opponent, who is assumed to be coming from the outside. This is the traditional model of warfare, in which contending military forces are conceptually and physically distinct and operate within separate geographical areas.

These assumptions, which can be traced to the use of Clausewitz's model, must be questioned. It can be argued that the conditions underlying Clausewitz's analysis are satisfied less and less frequently in contemporary wars. Rather than wars being between states, each deploying troops under unified command — such as in World War II — most armed struggles in recent decades have taken a different form, including such dimensions as paramilitary forces, civil war, shifting alliances, lack of a continuous front, guerrilla warfare, military coups, and attacks on and purposeful displacement of civilian populations — such as in the wars in former

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45 This brief mention of the intifada is for illustrative purposes. A sophisticated study of nonviolent strategy for Palestinian liberation is given by Dajani, *Eyes Without Country*.

Yugoslavia.<sup>46</sup>

Even when Clausewitzian assumptions are not satisfied, the idea of the center of gravity can be useful. However, the role of communication becomes more important in these cases. In a Clausewitzian model, communication is assumed to be unproblematic among the forces on either side. But in other circumstances — such as, in the case of social defense, when a fully operative system is not (yet) in place — communication may be a source of problems. In the case of coups, communication systems are vitally important, since they are primary means by which contending forces attempt to win loyalty from the population. Symbols, language, stated goals, modes of participation, and other aspects of communication are vital to maintaining unity, morale, and will/power of resisters.

Attack cannot be assumed to come from the “outside.” Again, coups provide a threat in which the “opponent” may include neighbors or co-workers. When the enemy is separate and distant, internal communication poses far fewer complexities than when opponents are mixed among “us.” Maintaining unity, morale, and will/power in the face of “intimate” struggles is a far greater challenge.

These considerations obviously apply to the case of the Soviet coup. Of course, there was no social defense system in place, but even so the idea of the center of gravity of the resistance can be usefully applied. The point is that communication issues should be given a much higher profile in analyses.

The center of gravity is also relevant to campaigns such as anti-MAI which was not social defense in the strict sense. However, the anti-MAI campaign could be considered community resistance to corporate oppression and exploitation which itself was backed up by force, namely the police and military of

dominant states that would enforce laws and repress challenges to property and the market. Whether or not the anti-MAI campaign is considered to be a form of social defense, the key point here is that the campaigners were not located in a defined geographical area, but rather dispersed over the globe. Hence communication was absolutely fundamental to the campaigners. Note that the idea of the center of gravity of the resistance applies nicely to this campaign.

None of the writers on social defense strategy consider the issue of absence of action or what measures might be taken to overcome it. Burrowes gives an insightful analysis of social defense strategies but does not address the question of how to create a social defense system or to promote action when people are ignorant of or indifferent to social problems or where other circumstances impede organization of resistance.

### Strategic nonviolent conflict

A different approach to strategy is taken by Peter Ackerman and Christopher Kruegler in their book *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict*.<sup>47</sup> After examining a number of major conflicts in which one side relied primarily on nonviolent action, they formulated a set of 12 principles for waging such conflicts (Table 1).

**Table 1**  
**Principles of Strategic Nonviolent Conflict**<sup>48</sup>  
*Principles of development*

1. Formulate functional objectives.
2. Develop organizational strengths.
3. Secure access to critical material resources.
4. Cultivate external assistance.
5. Expand the repertoire of sanctions.

*Principles of engagement*

46 For an overview, see Mary Kaldor, “Introduction,” in Mary Kaldor and Basker Vashee (eds.), *Restructuring the Global Military Sector. Volume 1: New Wars* (London: Pinter, 1997), pp. 3–33; Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999).

47 Peter Ackerman and Christopher Kruegler, *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: The Dynamics of People Power in the Twentieth Century* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994).

48 Ackerman and Kruegler, *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict*, p. 23.



6. Attack the opponents' strategy for consolidating control.

7. Mute the impact of the opponents' violent weapons.

8. Alienate opponents from expected bases of support.

9. Maintain nonviolent discipline.

*Principles of conception*

10. Assess events and options in light of levels of strategic decision making.

11. Adjust offensive and defensive operations according to the relative vulnerabilities of the protagonists.

12. Sustain continuity between sanctions, mechanisms, and objectives.

These principles, as stated, are rather abstract. Their meaning comes alive in application to case studies. Ackerman and Kruegler analyze six well-documented cases of nonviolent conflict, assessing to what degree each of the 12 principles was followed:

- the Russian revolution of 1904–1906;
- the Ruhrkampf (German resistance to French and Belgian occupation of the Ruhr), 1923;
- the Indian independence movement, 1930–1931;
- Danish resistance to Nazi occupation, 1940–1945;
- toppling of the El Salvadoran dictatorship by civic strike, 1944;
- Solidarity's campaigns against the Polish communist government, 1980–1981.

This approach might seem reminiscent of Schmid's ten conditions for the success of social defense, but actually it is quite different. Ackerman and Kruegler's aim is to see how campaigns using nonviolent action can be made more effective. They assume that nonviolent action is a potent option whose success does not depend entirely on conditions such as the strength of the opponent. They note that sometimes nonviolent action works when conditions seem very unfavorable and sometime fails when prospects look good. They are concerned about a variable over which the activists have considerable control: strategy.

Boserup and Mack, Keyes, and others also focused on strategy, but with special attention to the center of gravity. Instead of taking this road of looking for a central organizing principle,<sup>49</sup> Ackerman and Kruegler are in a sense more eclectic theoretically, looking primarily for things that work. They also take a broader ambit by looking at "strategic nonviolent conflict" rather than social defense. Even so, their work shares assumptions with studies of social defense strategy, notably that the nonviolent activists are sufficiently well organized to be able to formulate and implement a strategy.

It would be a valuable exercise to test the case studies in this book using Ackerman and Kruegler's against 12 principles. However, for our purposes here we look at the two key issues raised in earlier chapters: the role of communication and the absence of action.

Communication issues play only an incidental role in Ackerman and Kruegler's picture. For example, principle 1, "formulate functional objectives," means articulating an ultimate goal "toward which all levels of decision making are directed," as well as subordinate objectives. The objectives, they say, should be clear, concrete, specific, and attainable. Among the criteria for selecting objectives, they say that "the goals must attract the widest possible support within the societies affected by the conflict" and "objectives should resonate with the values or interests of external parties, in order to attract their support and potential assistance."<sup>50</sup> This suggests the importance not only of symbolic considerations — the way objectives are embedded and expressed in systems of meaning — but of methods of communicating them, whether through pictures, broadcasts, graffiti, slogans, or whatever. However, Ackerman and Kruegler do not devote much attention to this side of the issue, instead focusing on the

49 Ackerman and Kruegler do not cite the work of Boserup and Mack or Keyes, suggesting that they are not aware of it.

50 Ackerman and Kruegler, *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict*, p. 24.

choice of objectives as ideas rather than their mode of expression.

Communication is overtly relevant especially to principle 3, “secure access to critical material resources.” One of the critical material resources (along with food, water, clothing, energy, transport, and medical supplies) is communication infrastructure. They comment that “Deep redundancy of both quantity and type of communications gear is vital. A stockpile of quality fax machines, cellular phone, inexpensive short-wave radios, video and audio cassette players gives strategists the ability to make, disseminate, execute, and adjust their plans.”<sup>51</sup> However, aside from this mention of communication technology as a vital material resource, Ackerman and Kruegler give little attention to communication.

Ackerman and Kruegler do not address absence of action. Like the analysts of social defense strategy, they assume the existence of an organized group of nonviolent activists, including strategists.

### The great chain of nonviolence

Johan Galtung, one of the world’s foremost peace researchers, has presented the “great chain of nonviolence hypothesis.”<sup>52</sup> This

hypothesis, though not couched in terms of communication, is readily adapted to a communication perspective, and thus deserves our close attention.

Galtung starts with the Gandhian goal of using nonviolent action to bring about a “change of heart.” He notes that direct persuasion is often extremely difficult or unlikely because there is a great social distance between the parties in conflict; sometimes the nonviolent activists are dehumanized, so that their actions do not prick the consciences of the oppressors. Galtung thus sees the obstacle being psychological distance. This might apply, for example, in the case of East Timorese resistance to the Indonesian invasion and occupation. The Javanese rulers of Indonesia looked down on other ethnic groups as lesser people whose aspirations were inconsequential compared to Javanese hegemony. In the massacres of 1965–1966, communists were demonized and dehumanized, making killing easier and nonviolent resistance far less effective.

Galtung’s key idea is that liberation is not necessarily only the responsibility of the oppressed. Intermediate groups, especially those that have an identification with both the oppressor and the oppressed, can play a key role. Intermediate groups are links in the chain of nonviolence. If the oppressed cannot through their own actions persuade the oppressors to change their views and actions, they may nevertheless be able to create sympathy among third parties who themselves have more influence with the oppressors. Sometimes the chain will be a long one, with several intermediaries along the way between the oppressed and oppressor.

Galtung gives a table summarizing seven case studies of nonviolent action, showing in each case the oppressor, the oppressed, and intermediate groups. We reproduce the table here, adding our own case studies.

51 Ackerman and Kruegler, *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict*, p. 31. This list suggests that Ackerman and Kruegler are aware that network communication media (such as telephone) are more valuable to nonviolent campaigners than are broadcast media (such as television). However, they comment that “The same tools can be used for domination and repression” (p. xxiii), missing the point that while tools commonly have multiple uses, they are more easily used for some purposes than others, and hence it is to be expected that some communication technologies are more useful to nonviolent activists than to oppressors, and vice versa.

52 Johan Galtung, “Principles of nonviolent action: the great chain of nonviolence hypothesis,” in *Nonviolence and Israel/Palestine* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Institute for Peace, 1989), pp. 13–33.

**Table 1. Case studies of the great chain of nonviolence hypothesis<sup>53</sup>**

	<b>Oppressor</b>	<b>Intermediate groups</b>	<b>Oppressed</b>
Vietnam war	US state	US people, “doves,” including soldiers	Vietnamese people
India	British colonial state	(1) Other Britons; liberals; socialists (2) Gandhi, high-caste Indians	Indian poor
Nazi Germany: Holocaust	Nazis, Gestapo	Non-German wives of German Jews <sup>54</sup>	German Jews
South Africa: apartheid	South African white establishment	(1) Other South African whites (2) Famous South African blacks	South African blacks
Israel/Palestine	Israeli establishment	(1) “Moderate” Israelis (2) “Moderate” Palestinians	Palestinians
US South: civil rights	US white establishment	(1) US whites (2) Famous US blacks	US blacks
Philippines	Philippine elite (supported by US government)	Manila bourgeoisie; “leftists”	Filipino poor; rural/urban proletariat
Indonesia 1998	Suharto and ruling clique	Indonesian students	Indonesian people
Soviet Union 1991	Coup perpetrators	Media; armed forces; sections of KGB; government officials	Soviet people
MAI	Multinational corporations and governments of major capitalist states	Workers and middle-class activists in rich countries	Poor people, especially in poor countries

As described in chapter 2, Indonesian students, a relatively privileged group in Indonesian society, played a leading role in challenging the Suharto government in 1998. The students had links with workers, peasants, and dissidents, but also had connections with members of the ruling elite.

During the Soviet coup, most citizens remained inactive. Important contributing roles in the opposition were taken by a number

of groups, mainly in key cities, such as journalists, soldiers, and members of the government apparatus, including the KGB. These groups all had links to coup leaders and the mass of the population.

Campaigning against the MAI, described in chapter 4, was spearheaded by a range of activist groups, mainly in developed countries. They had links with workers’ movements on the one hand and with establishment figures on

53 Adapted from Galtung, “Principles of nonviolent action,” p. 27. Note that disagreement is possible over what groups fit under the categories of oppressor, intermediate groups, and oppressed. For example, nonviolence scholar Ralph Summy (personal communication, 21 February 2001) thinks that some of the intermediate groups listed in Table 1 should be classified under “oppressed,” such as US people and soldiers in the case of the Vietnam war and Gandhi and high caste Indians in the case of India.

54 In 1943 in Berlin, the Gestapo arrested German Jews, in preparation for transportation to concentration or death camps. Following a long public protest by spouses (mainly wives) of those arrested, the arrested Jews were released.

the other. Each of these cases thus fits nicely into the great chain model.

Galtung argues that the main danger in these cases is that the struggle benefits the in-between group, not the more severely oppressed one. For example, in the liberation of India from British colonial rule, the main beneficiaries were the Indian elite; the lives of Indian poor did not greatly benefit. Galtung's recommendation is that more struggles are needed. The great chain of nonviolence is a tool for liberation, but repeated uses are required.

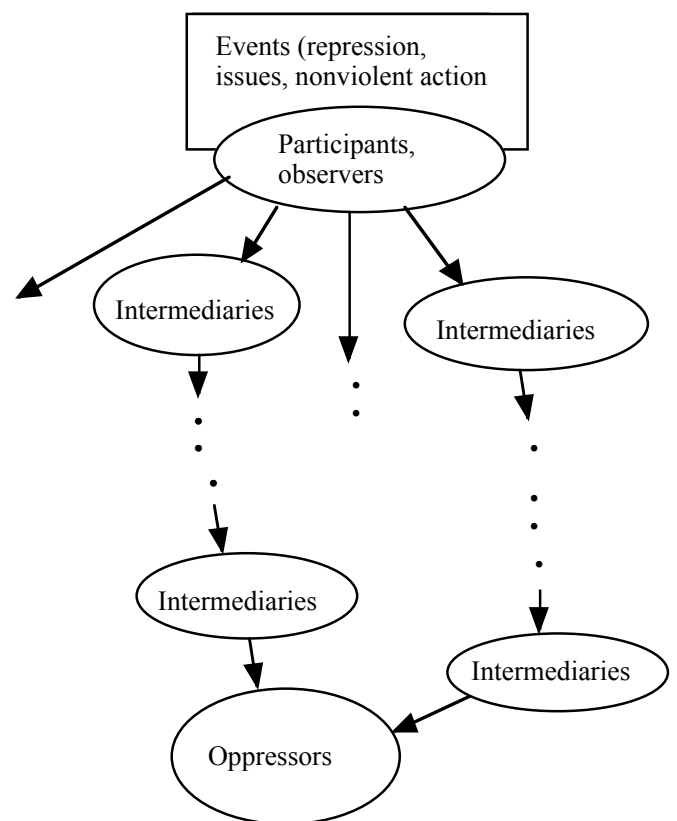
Of all the perspectives on nonviolence, the great chain hypothesis is the most amenable to development using communication perspectives. Whereas Galtung conceives the gap between oppressor and oppressed as one of social distance, it can also be interpreted as a communication failure. We will develop this idea in the next chapter.

One application of the great chain model is to the 1930 salt satyagraha, described at the beginning of this chapter. Thomas Weber analyzed the campaign to see if suffering by satyagrahis converted the lathi-wielding police. Quite the contrary: despite extensive injuries to protesters, with hundreds taken to hospitals, the beatings became worse. The British colonial government brazenly denied any police brutality, claiming that protesters had faked being injured.

The campaign was a success not due to direct conversion, as postulated by Gandhi, but because of *indirect* conversion. United Press journalist Webb Miller reported on the campaign to an international audience, telling about the gallant and disciplined Indian protesters and challenging British government disinformation. This reporting helped turn international opinion against British colonial rule in India. Webb Miller and the international press served as vital links in a great chain of nonviolence between Indians and British rulers.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Thomas Weber, "The marchers simply walked forward until struck down": nonviolent suffering and conversion," *Peace & Change*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 1993, pp. 267–289.

Although Galtung does not explicitly deal with the issue of absence of action, the chain of nonviolence can be readily adapted for this purpose by attributing absence of action to missing or flawed links in the chain of nonviolence. In other words, if appropriate messages cannot "get through" from the oppressed to the oppressor, the problem may lie in the absence or shortcomings of intermediate groups.



**Figure 5.1. The great chain of nonviolence.**

Are there enough links to form a great chain? Recent research on "small world theory" shows that in a network, if there are even just a few random connections, then it takes remarkably few links to span the gap between any two parties in the network.<sup>56</sup> The

<sup>56</sup> Robert Matthews, "Get connected," *New Scientist*, Vol. 164, 4 December 1999, pp. 24–28. For a more comprehensive and mathematical treatment, see Duncan J. Watts, *Small Worlds: The*

world population can certainly be conceived of as a network of people, of which oppressors and the oppressed are members. Small world theory suggests that in communicating against repression, there are plenty of potential intermediaries to make a fairly short chain, and hence that absence of action is likely to be due to weaknesses in links rather than their unavailability.

This conclusion is further supported by noting that, as well as using existing chains, new ones can be forged. One of the important activities of Amnesty International groups is to write to governments on behalf of prisoners of conscience. This can be interpreted as a strategy to build a communication chain between concerned citizens in one country and oppressors in another. The challenge is to increase the strength of the citizen-oppressor links.

## Conclusion

How can communication be used more effectively against repression and oppression in active nonviolent struggles? What can be done, in the face of repression and oppression, when there is a relative absence of action? In this chapter we have canvassed perspectives on nonviolent action and social defense in seeking answers to these questions.

This tour of ideas has revealed the rich history and repertoire of nonviolent action, as well as its potential for improvement. Our case studies in chapters 2 to 4 can be seen as part of a long tradition of nonviolent action, about which much is known but far more is yet to be discovered through both research and further action.

Considering that nonviolent action is above all a struggle for loyalties, it is surprising that communication has such a low profile in theories about it. Gandhi assumed that principled nonviolent action would speak directly to opponents, helping to convert them. Most theorists and activists, though, have taken a

pragmatic approach, using nonviolent action to pressure or coerce opponents, with conversion an optional bonus. Yet in all cases it is essential to build support, both among those subject to attack or oppression and among third parties, and, in building support, the process of communication is vital. Access to information and struggles over meanings are absolutely crucial in nonviolent campaigns but have received relatively little attention. In particular, absence of action has been off the agenda. The great chain of nonviolence as formulated by Galtung provides the most promising foundation for dealing with communication for nonviolence.

Our examination of perspectives on nonviolent action has shown that there is considerable scope for further exploration of the role of communication. We next turn to perspectives on communication to see what they might contribute to an improvement in the effectiveness of nonviolent action.

## Communication theory: insights for nonviolent action

In the previous chapter we surveyed a range of perspectives on nonviolent action and social defense, looking for insights into improving communication in struggles against repression, aggression, and oppression. Communication is fundamental to nonviolent action, centrally in the sense that nonviolent action is itself a form of communication and secondarily in the role of communication to coordinate nonviolent resistance and win over third parties. However, researchers on nonviolent action have not placed communication at the center of their analyses. So, while research provides a wealth of insight into the dynamics and strategy of nonviolent action, there is much less available about how to develop effective communication strategies. In particular, situations in which there is relatively little action receive virtually no attention. Johan Galtung's idea of the great chain of nonviolence seems to be the best starting point from within the nonviolence literature for a closer look at communication and nonviolence.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter we continue this quest by examining a range of perspectives on communication, seeing what they can offer to nonviolent activists, especially in dealing with the problem of ebbs of action. We look at the transmission model, media effects theory, semiotics, medium theory, political economy, and organizational theory. Our aim is not a comprehensive overview of communication theory<sup>2</sup> — a mammoth task — but rather scrutiny of various perspectives in an attempt to draw out insights that can provide guidance for nonviolent activists. This means that our

aim is not necessarily theoretical sophistication, and certainly not just for its own sake, but rather “useful theory” — in this case, useful for activists and sympathetic researchers.<sup>3</sup> A model that has some theoretical shortcomings may nevertheless be more valuable to activists than a “theoreticians’ theory” that cannot be easily understood or applied in the field.<sup>4</sup> For example, Gene Sharp's theory of power, discussed in the previous chapter, has theoretical inadequacies but is very useful for nonviolent activists. In the following survey of theories, we aim at presenting core ideas in a simple manner, seeking to extract insights relevant to communication against repression, aggression, and oppression.

### The transmission model

In the late 1940s, Claude Shannon developed a mathematical theory of communication aimed at solving the technical problem of working out how much information can be sent down a transmission channel. In the famous book *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*, Shannon's analysis is supplemented by a commentary by Warren Weaver that presented Shannon's ideas as a general model of

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1 Johan Galtung, “Principles of nonviolent action: the great chain of nonviolence hypothesis,” in *Nonviolence and Israel/Palestine* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Institute for Peace, 1989), pp. 13–33.

2 For a useful overview, see Denis McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction* (London: Sage, 1994, 3rd ed).

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3 A superb activist-oriented approach to communication is given by Charlotte Ryan, *Prime Time Activism: Media Strategies for Grassroots Organizing* (Boston: South End Press, 1991). We follow Ryan's example in canvassing a series of perspectives on communication theory, looking for relevant insights. Whereas Ryan focuses on media strategies for US social activists, we look for insights specifically relevant to fostering nonviolent action against repression, aggression, and oppression.

4 See Brian Martin, “On the value of simple ideas,” in *Information Liberation* (London: Freedom Press, 1998), pp. 143–163, on building theory that is useful to activists.

communication.<sup>5</sup> This model, which can be called signal transmission theory or message transmission theory, is encapsulated in Figure 6.1.

In the case of nonviolent action, the information source might be nonviolent activists and the destination could be the opponent (especially in a Gandhian attempt at conversion), other activists, or noncommitted observers, including people in another country. There are various transmitters and receivers along the way, such as telephones, journalists, and government officials. Thinking more broadly, an action group or an entire social movement might be said to be a transmitter too. Finally, the noise source can include things such as interference on telephone lines, government disinformation, journalists' news values, cultural mismatches, and preconceived ideas.

The limitations of the transmission model are many, including difficulty in dealing with interactive communication, difficulty in dealing with the meaning of messages (rather than just the quantity of information), and difficulty in incorporating the social context (such as organizational culture). From the point of view of many in cultural studies, the transmission model is primitive, tainted, and better relegated to technical arenas from whence it came. Nevertheless, for all its limitations, it is possible to extract valuable insights from the model, at least for our purposes.<sup>6</sup> In particular,

government control and censorship of communication — as occurred routinely in the Soviet Union and in Indonesia under Suharto — are more readily conceptualized in a transmission model than in a cultural model that highlights issues of meaning.

William Leiss demonstrates how the transmission model has been adapted to study communication of information about health and environmental risks, by speaking of problems of communication associated with the source, transmitter, channel, and message.<sup>7</sup> This is shown in Figure 6.2.

Difficulties in gaining support can be mapped onto the model. Consider, for example, the Stalinist purges in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, and the challenge of alerting people around the world who might have taken action.

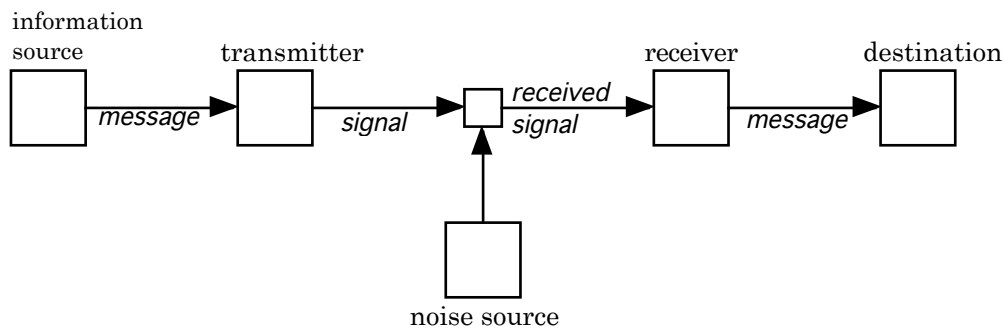
- Source problems would include fear of reprisals, self-censorship due to belief in the socialist project, and lack of understanding of what was occurring.
- Transmitter problems would include lack of technology for communicating directly with people outside the Soviet Union.
- Channel problems would include Soviet censorship as well as censorship by Western spy agencies and foreign affairs departments.
- Message problems would include language and cultural differences, and difficulties in explaining the dynamics of purges.
- Receiver problems would include militarist anticommunism in the West (causing receivers to use information to condemn communism rather than act effectively to stop the purges) and leftwing procommunism in the West (leading receivers to dismiss the information).

5 Claude E. Shannon and Warren Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1949).

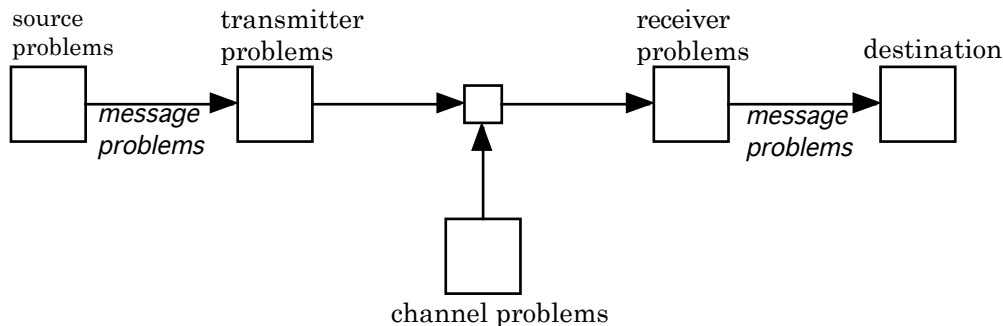
6 We are encouraged in this endeavor by three cultural studies scholars, Lawrence Grossberg, Ellen Wartella, and D. Charles Whitney, *Media-Making: Mass Media in a Popular Culture* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998), who state (p. 25), "Although many scholars assume that the transmission and cultural models of communication contradict each other — that they have to choose one model or the other — we strongly disagree. We believe that each model has something important to say about the complexities of communication in the contemporary world; the usefulness of each model depends on our particular questions about communication. Thus, we prefer to

think of the two models as complementary perspectives."

7 William Leiss, "Risk communication and public knowledge," in David Crowley and David Mitchell (eds.), *Communication Theory Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), pp. 127–139. For an application of the model to information inequality, see William Wresch, *Disconnected: Haves and Have-Nots in the Information Age* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996).



**Figure 6.1. The transmission model of communication**



**Figure 6.2. Problems in communication, in the framework of the transmission model**

Similar applications can readily be made to other cases, for example problems in getting information about East Timor to potential supporters in other countries, and problems in getting information about the MAI to concerned citizens.

There is a fair bit of arbitrariness involved in applying the model to cases of repression and nonviolent action, especially in complex cases involving a chain of sources and receivers. For example, there is no rule on how to judge whether Soviet censorship is best described as a channel problem or a transmitter problem or some combination. However, this is not a major drawback, since the main value of the model is as a heuristic device to highlight communication blockages.

This approach is most effective in dealing with interruptions in information flow and least effective in dealing with issues of meaning. For example, in the case of East

Timor under Indonesian occupation, the seizing of a radio transmitter in northern Australia was an obvious communication blockage, and can be conceptualized as a channel problem or, appropriately in this case, a transmitter problem, and seems straightforward. (Although called a channel or transmitter problem, the problem in this case was not technical breakdown but political instruction/obstruction.) In contrast, the process by which information about Indonesian oppression and atrocities in East Timor were interpreted in the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs — namely as not requiring action or further dissemination — can be conceptualized as a receiver problem, but this is to simplify a complex process that needs unpacking. The receiver and transmitter problems in this example are linked, both arising from Australian government policy.



The transmission model meshes very well with the great chain of nonviolence model, which can be conceived of as a chain of senders and receivers, with each link in the chain subject to source, transmitter, message, channel, and receiver problems.

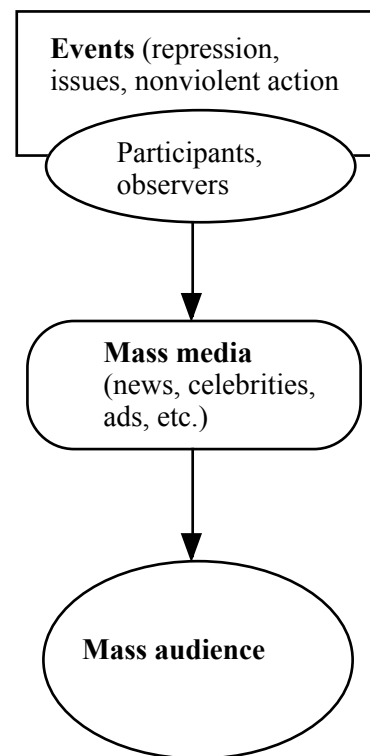
One of the greatest values of the transmission model is its relevance to absence of action. If we start with the assumption that action against oppression is more likely when people know about it and have a means of taking action, then the transmission model draws attention to where, between the oppression and the people who might take action, there is a blockage. As we will see in the following sections, other communication theories provide insight into particular types of blockages.

### Media effects theory

The mass media — television, radio, major newspapers — are truly “mass” in the sense that they are consumed by large numbers of people. Since the messages contained in the mass media are similar, it is to be expected that media consumers will end up with similar understandings of the world. Or such, at least, was the conclusion of many researchers adopting the mass audience model.<sup>8</sup> A simple representation of this model is given in Figure 6.3. It is based on the idea that messages are “injected” directly into audiences.

Closely aligned to this model is the conception of “mass society.” Let us first describe “non-mass society.” When people are tightly linked to each other through local social institutions such as the family, churches, workplaces, trade unions, sporting clubs, political parties, and community groups, they are likely to formulate their views of the world through frameworks drawn from those institutions. The perspectives developed through

working in a family business or participating in a tightly knit congregation will likely take precedence over challenging messages from the media. For example, advertising promoting consumerism may not be able to overturn a family culture of frugality or a church culture of charity.



**Figure 6.3**  
A simple picture of mass communication

A number of processes have led to a weakening of tight community bonds. For example, industrialization undermined the family farm and family business, leading to a more anonymous industrial workforce. Consumerism has fostered individualism, reducing concern for others. Secularization has challenged the cultural role of churches. The women’s movement has contributed to a weakening of the patriarchal extended family. Multiculturalism has undermined ethnic exclusivity. There are various diagnoses of these trends, but in any case the observation is that individuals are less tied to local social institutions.

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of work in the field, see for example W. Russell Neuman, *The Future of the Mass Audience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). We thank Chris Barker and an anonymous referee for helpful comments about terminology.

When local social connections that give meaning to life are drastically weakened, individuals can be said to be part of an anonymous mass. This is “mass society.” In mass society, the individual is more susceptible to viewpoints presented in the mass media. Mass media in turn help to create a mass society since, for the first time, large numbers of people from different regions and different walks of life were exposed to identical messages. The classic case of concern is Germany under Nazi rule. Germany’s defeat in World War I, the collapse of the currency in the early 1920s and then the depression devastated the middle and working classes, especially by destroying economic security. After coming to power in 1933, the Nazis systematically smashed or intimidated organizations that could pose a threat to them, especially left-wing parties, trade unions, and dissenting voices. Finally, Hitler brilliantly tapped into collective fears and fantasies, using mass rallies and radio, while the government stifled alternative views from appearing in mass forums.

The idea that the population is an undifferentiated mass susceptible to pitches in the mass media is of little practical value to social activists. After all, activists as a rule do not want to manipulate the population, but rather to encourage them to become informed and active on issues of concern. Nevertheless, the idea of the mass audience can give insights into the ways that mass media promote collective passivity. Our aim here is to see what can be learned from the mass audience perspective — commonly called media effects theory — for the purpose of developing nonviolent challenges to repression, aggression, and oppression. The focus in this theory is on the effects that media have on audiences, as opposed to the activity of audiences in interpreting and using media for their own purposes.

Before proceeding, it is important to note the severe limitations of media effects theory. Although this theory was once the dominant framework for media studies, it has come under sustained attack and is largely discredited in many circles.

First, no society has ever come close to being a “mass society.” Most people are still connected to each other in families, workplaces, and a variety of groups. Though some social institutions, such as churches, have declined in significance, others have arisen such as women’s groups and environmental organizations. While job mobility has undercut solidarity built around localities, there are new, constantly evolving networks of association based on technologies of mobility and communication, such as cars, planes, the telephone, and e-mail.

Second, the mass media have never been the only source of information and continue to be challenged. Word of mouth, leaflets, specialty newsletters and magazines, telephone, and alternative radio are some of the means by which people are exposed to divergent viewpoints about the world. With the increasing capacity of industry to produce a diversity of products at relatively low cost, there is ever more targeting and creation of niche markets. With vast numbers of television channels, for example, there is more “narrow-casting” and less broadcasting.

Third, the influence of the mass media on individuals is far weaker than postulated in the stronger versions of media effects theory. Most people do not just soak up whatever appears in the mass media, but instead actively filter, interpret, and transform the material from their own perspectives and for their own purposes.<sup>9</sup> For example, minority cultural groups may adopt corporate symbols — such as slogans or logos — as an ironic statement of their own identity.<sup>10</sup>

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9 The classic statement of the possibility of messages being read in ways differing from the encoded meaning, and more generally the importance of analyzing systems of meaning production, discourse, and decoding, is Stuart Hall, “Encoding/decoding,” in Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, and Paul Willis (eds.), *Culture, Media, Language* (London: Hutchinson, 1980), pp. 128–138.

10 Rosemary J. Coombe, *The Cultural Life of Intellectual Properties: Authorship, Appropriation,*

Cultural studies scholars focus their attention on difference and resistance, and are rightly critical of the simplifications inherent in the idea of mass society. However, it is possible to become preoccupied with difference and resistance to such an extent that processes fostering conformity and acquiescence are downplayed or overlooked. Heavy viewing of mainstream television is still commonplace. Some individuals seem to let their views be dictated by radio talk show hosts. Many of the new links that people make through e-mail and long-distance travel are quite superficial. Many people have only a limited capacity to reinterpret media messages. When atrocities occur but few people become aware or take action, it is time to ask why. Media effects theory may be able to offer some insights.<sup>11</sup>

It stands to reason that mass media will have the greatest influence on people concerning issues about which they have the least personal experience. If farmers know that prices have been disastrously low for years and that many of their neighbors are going broke and being bought out by city-based corporations, they are not likely to be convinced by newspaper reports about the virtues of tariff cuts or how deregulation has led to a more responsive banking sector. City dwellers are more likely to be receptive to understanding rural issues using frameworks underlying media stories. Few people have personal experience of terrorism or high-tech warfare. Therefore, media portrayals are likely to play a big role in constructing understand-

ings of these issues for large sections of the population.

One area where few people have direct experience is politics at the level of government, including policy formation, election campaigning, and, especially, international affairs. Nearly everything most people learn about national and international politicians and activities is via the media. We read about or see television footage about a coup in Pakistan; we rely on the media because few people have friends or workmates with personal experience in Pakistani politics. (Even in Pakistan itself, few people have direct personal experience in national-level politics.) Some critics have argued that the mass media create artificial political realities which are so divorced from what is understood by those close to the events that they can be said to be "political fantasies." Dan Nimmo and James E. Combs argue that "Few people learn about politics through direct experience; for most persons political realities are mediated through mass and group communication, a process resulting as much in the creation, transmission and adoption of political fantasies as realistic views of what takes place."<sup>12</sup>

Various groups participate in the creation of political fantasies, especially governments and the media. We will look more closely at the processes by which this occurs in the discussion of organizational theory later in this chapter. For now, we look at some characteristic features of mass media framing of reality, concentrating on aspects of particular relevance to nonviolent struggle. We examine in

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and the Law (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

11 For a critique of the cultural studies approach of the active audience, see Robert Kubey, "On not finding media effects: conceptual problems in the notion of an 'active' audience (with a reply to Elihu Katz)," in James Hay, Lawrence Grossberg, and Ellen Wartella (eds.), *The Audience and its Landscape* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996), pp. 187–205; William R. Seaman, "Active audience theory: pointless populism," *Media, Culture & Society*, Vol. 14, No. 2, April 1992, pp. 301–311.

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12 Dan Nimmo and James E. Combs, *Mediated Political Realities* (New York: Longman, 1983), p. xv. We follow Nimmo and Combs in our choice to examine news, Hollywood, celebrities, and sport. They also look at election campaigns and media melodramas. See also Murray Edelman, *Politics as Symbolic Action: Mass Arousal and Quiescence* (Chicago: Markham, 1971); David L. Paletz and Robert M. Entman, *Media • Power • Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1981); Michael Parenti, *Inventing Reality: The Politics of the Mass Media* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986).

turn news, Hollywood, celebrities, sport, and advertising.<sup>13</sup>

**News.** In principle, the news provides an ideal platform for informing people about what is happening in the world and offering opportunities for intervening against repression, aggression, and oppression. In practice, news often turns people into spectators, making them aware of problems but with little sense of responsibility or power to do anything about them or any vision of an alternative.

Consider any of the many horrific events reported in the mass media, such as the wars in former Yugoslavia, the killing fields of Cambodia, or the Iran-Iraq war. In these cases, there was quite a lot of reporting on what was happening. (Many equivalent wars and atrocities receive little media attention, such as the 1965-1966 massacres in Indonesia.<sup>14</sup>) However, *knowing* about a problem and *doing* something about it are two different things. The news, in almost all cases, only tells about the problem. It seldom provides any encouragement for ordinary viewers or readers to do something.<sup>15</sup> Especially for international events, news reports assume that action is the responsibility of governments and interna-

tional organizations such as the United Nations. If citizens are called to participate, it is usually to contribute money or goods for relief efforts, as in the wake of "natural disasters" such as floods and earthquakes.<sup>16</sup>

For many people, the news becomes a spectacle, to be observed but with no implications for personal behavior.<sup>17</sup> The values that govern selection of stories (discussed later under organizational theory) lead to an emphasis on violence. Wars and violent clashes often receive attention in the media, whereas peaceful protests receive far less attention and patient trust-building efforts in local communities are virtually invisible.

Especially in the case of international news, governments are presented as the key actors, often via top politicians. The implication is that if action needs to be taken, it is governments that should be doing it. Therefore the news encourages appeals to governments.

However, there are many exceptions to this tendency. Many citizen protests are reported in the news, providing an example for viewers. Furthermore, news reports can be used crea-

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13 An anonymous referee correctly pointed out that many of the points made in this section can also be examined through a cultural studies lens. Our placement of this material in the media effects section is what we found convenient and is not intended as an endorsement of one approach over another. Since no body of communication theory has paid much attention to nonviolent action, it would be unwise to rule out or endorse any approach to communication.

14 For a detailed treatment of the US mass media's international news coverage of war and other crises, see Susan D. Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

15 This point is well made by Eesha Williams, *Grassroots Journalism* (New York: Apex Press, 2000), p. 53: "More than anything, mainstream news coverage advocates passivity; next time you read the paper look for how many articles cover news that matters directly to your life and that you can act on. Not many."

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16 This is implicit in the discussion by Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue*. She comments that "Compassion fatigue is a result of inaction and itself causes inaction" (p. 52). In other words, being unable to act makes people less receptive to images of suffering.

17 For assessments of the replacement of reality by images, in the media and elsewhere, see Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image or What Happened to the American Dream* (New York: Atheneum, 1962); Ian I. Mitroff and Warren Bennis, *The Unreality Industry: The Deliberate Manufacturing of Falsehood and What It Is Doing to Our Lives* (New York: Carol, 1989). On the media specifically, see for example Robert Cirino, *Don't Blame the People: How the News Media Use Bias, Distortion and Censorship to Manipulate Public Opinion* (Los Angeles, Diversity Press, 1971); Donna Woolfolk Cross, *Mediaspeak: How Television Makes Up Your Mind* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1983); Bruce I. Newman, *The Mass Marketing of Politics: Democracy in an Age of Manufactured Images* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999).

tively by activist constituencies to mobilize further action.

Different groups respond to the news in different ways. For example, western reports of war in former Yugoslavia were interpreted very differently by Serbians, Croatians, and others who had emigrated to other countries. It is at this point that the mass audience model clearly breaks down: media consumers are far from a passive homogeneous mass when it comes to the news. While this point is vitally important, especially for nonviolent activists, media effects theory is still useful in pointing to features of the news that encourage spectatorship and passivity:

- news is often presented and accepted as a spectacle that is separate from day-to-day activities;
- news emphasizes violence and downplays nonviolent action;
- news encourages the idea that world problems are the responsibility of governments and seldom mentions the option of direct action by citizens;
- news reports on what *is* happening and seldom provides a vision of alternatives outside the political mainstream.

Eesha Williams advocates “grassroots journalism,” aimed at inspiring action, as an alternative to conventional mass media news.<sup>18</sup> This sort of journalism is relevant to people’s lives, emphasizes quiet as well as dramatic grassroots victories (and failures), stimulates action, and indicates what can be done, without preaching. Thus in every respect grassroots journalism is contrary to news that promotes passivity.

**Hollywood.** News is normally conceived of as reporting of facts, whereas Hollywood productions for television and film are, with some exceptions, fictional. Yet in the consumption of media, especially television, these distinctions become less salient. If news is a spectacle, it is simply another form of entertainment, to be followed by a popular television program. In the media construction

of reality, Hollywood portrayals can be as significant as those of the news desks and sometimes more so.

Violence is far more prevalent in Hollywood creations than in everyday life. In some genres, such as family comedies and game shows, violence is rare, but it is standard in others such as police dramas. Although the average member of the police never discharges a firearm in duty through their entire career, an episode in a police drama without use of guns is an exception. Other forms of violence, including fighting and beatings, are routine in television and films, again depending on the genre.

Most worrisome, from the point of view of nonviolent activists, is Hollywood’s requirement for a happy ending in which good triumphs over evil — very frequently by force. The message is that violence is acceptable so long as it is for a good cause; sometimes a good cause even seems to be defined by the more effective use of violence. The star wars epics and James Bond fantasies are familiar examples.

Violence is often portrayed in a stylized and artificial fashion that has little connection to everyday realities. In fist fights on the screen, there are prolonged exchanges of blows, any one of which would normally be enough to knock out or disable an opponent, accompanied by unrealistic sound effects that dramatize the hits. Victims of gunfire are often killed outright or injured “cleanly,” with few realistic portrayals of permanent disability or suffering for more than a short scene. Screen violence is curiously antiseptic, as if it does not really hurt and any “good guy” is bound to survive to fight again. Screen violence is almost entirely a masculine activity — one of its more realistic aspects.

Evidence about the effects of viewing violence on the screen is mixed. If it contributes to violence by viewers, the impact may be relatively small and may affect only a minority of viewers, since otherwise we would see punch-ups in the street every day following the previous evening’s screen violence. On the other hand, exposure to media violence may have effects on psychological development,

18 Williams, *Grassroots Journalism*.

interpersonal relations, and behavior under stress that are important but hard to quantify. However, sidestepping the long-running debate over the effects of viewing screen violence, we can make a simple point: there are very few Hollywood portrayals of nonviolent action as a method of social struggle. There are a few films that fill this role, including *Gandhi* (by far the best known example), *Milagro*, and *The Mission*. For the most part, nonviolence as a method is off the Hollywood agenda. The message coming out of Hollywood is that the way to obtain results is through violence, and the only way to overcome violence from bad guys is more effective use of violence by good guys.

Again, not everyone interprets Hollywood the same way, and Hollywood fantasies can be used by viewers for their own purposes. Furthermore, film and television production outside of Hollywood often departs from or directly challenges the Hollywood formula. Nevertheless, the mass audience perspective can alert us to the impact of Hollywood portrayals on the way many viewers conceive the world. Nonviolent activists need to take this into account in developing communication strategies.

**Celebrities.** Hollywood, through films and television, is the primary force behind the rise of celebrity culture in the 1900s. By bringing images of particular individuals onto the large screen or into living rooms, these individuals become “larger than life” and personally familiar. It is now hard to imagine the time just a century ago when there were no celebrities in the current sense and when prominent figures were primarily known for what they did rather than who they were. Celebrities today include TV and movie stars, sporting heroes, politicians, prominent news readers, and many others.<sup>19</sup>

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19 On celebrity culture, see P. David Marshall, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Richard Schickel, *Common Fame: The Culture of Celebrity* (London: Pavilion Books, 1985). On the manufacturing of celebrity, a major

There are a few celebrities known primarily for their association with violence, such as General Norman Schwarzkopf and movie star Sylvester Stallone. However, far more important than this is the way that celebrity culture emphasizes the significance of prominent individuals, so that collective social action is thrown into a shadow.

Nonviolent action does not need celebrities. None came to the fore in the collapse of Eastern European communist regimes in 1989, except possibly dissident Vaclav Havel who became president of Czechoslovakia. The anti-MAI campaign was a grassroots effort; none of the grassroots activists became celebrities. The toppling of Suharto was the result of people's action; no celebrities were needed.

Some nonviolent activists and leaders do become celebrities. The two most prominent are Mohandas K. Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.<sup>20</sup> Others include Cesar Chavez and Danilo Dolci.<sup>21</sup> As we write, the most prominent figure is Burmese leader and Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi.

Celebrities in the nonviolence area perform contradictory functions. On the positive side, their visibility helps promote the idea of nonviolence. Their example, by being widely circulated, provides an inspiration to others and helps recruit new activists.

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industry that is little recognized, see Irving J. Rein, Philip Kotler, and Martin R. Stoller, *High Visibility* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1987).

20 Gandhi and King are perhaps the two most prominent leaders in the twentieth century who were never heads of state. An excellent treatment of nonviolent action, building on the life and words of these two figures, is Mary King, *Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr: The Power of Nonviolent Action* (Paris: UNESCO, 1999). We thank Tom Weber for helpful comments on Gandhi as celebrity.

21 Susan Ferriss and Ricardo Sandoval, *The Fight in the Fields: Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers Movement* (edited by Diana Hembree) (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1997); James McNeish, *Fire under the Ashes: The Life of Danilo Dolci* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1965).

On the negative side, emphasis on celebrity activists draws attention away from the collective, participatory nature of nonviolent action and away from the importance of quiet, rational, behind-the-scenes leadership roles.<sup>22</sup> Inequalities in media attention can cause resentment among other nonviolence leaders. Any personal flaw or misjudgment by a celebrity activist holds the potential for serious damage to the movement. Finally, the presence of celebrity activists can distort campaigning by emphasizing media values at the expense of movement building and giving too great an orientation to charisma.<sup>23</sup>

As a consequence of the mass media creation of celebrities, many people are aware of nonviolent action only through the names of Gandhi and King. Whatever the pluses and minuses of this state of affairs, it needs to be taken into account by nonviolent activists.

**Sport.** One of the most popular things disseminated by mass media is sport, which has been transformed dramatically by professionalization and commercialization over the past century.<sup>24</sup> Sport is big business to a large

extent through the creation of a mass audience, especially via television. The Olympics, originally set up as an amateur movement, have been transformed into a professional, commercial operation, with opportunities for earning money through the mass media responsible for much of the change.<sup>25</sup> In dealing with sport in relation to media effects theory, we are primarily interested in the impact of sport on spectators rather than on participants.

Although sport is normally conceived of as a “separate world,” bounded by its own rules — which is one reason for its popularity — it has a number of connections with politics, economics, psychology, and so forth. Here, with our focus on nonviolence, we look briefly at sport as a metaphor or model for human relations.

Sport, in its most popular forms, is a competition between individuals or teams, in which, ideally, the rules are fair, adversaries use the same methods, and the better side wins. This provides a model for warfare and business competition, with the ideological advantage of obscuring the great inequalities in the strength of armies and corporations. The assumptions underlying sport are less congruent with the dynamics of nonviolent action. A nonviolent struggle is, in a sense, a competition between two (or more) sides, but the adversaries do not use the same methods, at least when one side is willing to use violence. The “rules” are not fair, since there is no umpire to prevent destruction, torture, and killing by the side using violence.

A nonviolent struggle is certainly a form of conflict, like sport, but typically a desired outcome is cooperation and a win-win solution to the conflict rather than outright defeat of the opponent. Such a cooperative result is not possible in competitive sport, where winning and losing are integral to the contest. Finally,

22 Ralph Summy, “Ordinary mortals of nonviolence,” *Gandhi Marg*, Vol. 22, No. 3, Oct-Dec 2000, pp. 279–290, powerfully argues that some nonviolence “heroes” operate out of the public eye, using political analysis and rational argument, rather than being highly visible figures with formal status, charisma, or celebrityhood.

23 Too great an orientation to the mass media can be a problem for social movements even when celebrities are not involved. For studies of movements and the mass media, see Stephen Dale, *McLuhan's Children: The Greenpeace Message and the Media* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1996); Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); Marc Raboy, *Movements and Messages: Media and Radical Politics in Quebec* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1984); Andrew Rojecki, *Silencing the Opposition: Antinuclear Movements and the Media in the Cold War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

24 One of the best accounts of the interactions between sport and media is David Rowe, *Sport*,

*Culture and the Media: The Unruly Trinity* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999).

25 See, for example, Andrew Jennings, *The New Lords of the Rings: Olympic Corruption and How to Buy Gold Medals* (London: Pocket Books, 1996).

it is worth mentioning that the most popular sports involve competitions between men, often involving violence or at least heavy physical clashes.

Sport is widely watched and to some extent provides a shared model for understanding the world, as suggested by expressions such as “scoring,” “level playing field,” “getting to first base,” and “being a team player.” Elements of sport, seen as a separate world, are used as a model for “real life.” Though this provides some connections to nonviolent action — especially the elements of communal solidarity — to a greater extent the model of sport is uncongenial to the goal of helping people grasp the potential of nonviolent means of social struggle. Thus the mass media encourage an understanding of life as a form of sport, with an emphasis on competition and violence.

**Advertising.** Advertising is ubiquitous in capitalist societies, with the average person exposed to hundreds of messages daily. Although some advertisements are tailored for individuals or small groups, by far the majority are aimed at a mass audience, especially using television, radio, newspapers, magazines, leaflets, and billboards. How does this barrage of commercial messages affect the willingness to take action against repression, aggression, and oppression?

Advertisements are built on several assumptions, two of which in particular are likely to hinder mobilization for citizen action. The first key assumption is that solutions to problems are for sale, rather than being readily solved without purchases. A related assumption is that the most important problems are those for which purchases can provide a solution. Nonviolent action, in contrast, relies on people taking action themselves rather than purchasing security or freedom (such as through professional military forces). The second key assumption underlying advertising is that most problems are individual problems for which there are individual solutions, namely purchased products and services. Indeed, people’s relationships with others are often insinuated to be competitive, for

example competing for status. Nonviolent action, in contrast, is a participatory, collective endeavor for addressing social problems.

Thus, in as much as people adopt the assumptions underlying the profusion of advertising, they are made less receptive to collective, participatory action as an approach to solving social problems.

**Conclusion.** The continuing displays of nonviolent action are a living testimony that mass communication is not a universal pacifier. Social institutions such as the family, workplace, and community groups provide sources of allegiance and meaning; mass media provide a range of messages that can be interpreted in varying ways; and there are many alternative sources of information. These are among the reasons why media effects theory is less than adequate, indeed misleading, on its own.

However, although the theory has deep flaws, it is still possible to gain insights from it. When there are reports of atrocities in foreign countries, few people join social action groups to take action. There are a number of possible explanations for this lack of response, one of which relates to characteristics of mass communication. There is much more attention to violence than nonviolence in news reports, Hollywood dramas, and sporting events. There is an assumption underlying much advertising that the only problems a person need be concerned about are ones for which a solution can be purchased. Most importantly, mass media position people as spectators rather than an active participants, except for the role of consumer.<sup>26</sup> While the mass media processes

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26 While from one perspective mass media encourage passivity, from another the mass media are only responding, in a competitive struggle for audiences, to what people want. The dilemma here is that what people want is not always what they know is good for them. This dilemma appears in many areas. People want to be healthy, but they also want to avoid exercise, preferring to drive a car rather than walk or ride a bicycle. They want to be healthy but will indulge their appetites for unhealthy food. They want to be healthy but want to smoke. In every case, government and corporate



that encourage passivity, individualism, and belief in the value of violence can readily be challenged, they do have considerable influence. It is vital that those who see nonviolent action as a means of challenging repression, aggression, and oppression are aware of the dynamics involved.

### Semiotics<sup>27</sup>

Semiotics is the study of systems of meaning, especially by analyzing signs, which are things that produce meanings. Words are the most obvious examples of signs, but there are also pictures, gestures, physical objects, faces, film, and many others to consider. In most cases, meanings are not built into signs but are to a large extent arbitrary and socially constructed. For example, the word “boycott” is, in English, arbitrarily used to refer to certain actions involving refusals to purchase. Meanings vary from person to person, and from culture to culture. For many signs, there is a dominant meaning (the denotation) but also a range of associated meanings (connota-

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interests have a stake in unhealthy habits, through selling cars, fatty foods, and cigarettes. There is less profit to be made, in the present system, in town planning to encourage exercise, in food production geared toward healthy diets, or in nonaddictive lifestyles. What might be said is that it is in the interests of powerful organizations to encourage people to give in to their immediate appetites (their wants) rather than collectively organize society to encourage activities and habits that lead to long-term health and satisfaction. The same applies to media. While it might be better for people to develop a taste for in-depth analyses and to link learning about the world to practical action to improve people’s lives, the current system encourages media organizations to pander to people’s immediate appetite for relaxation and entertainment. From this point of view, blaming either media organizations or media consumers is beside the point: the challenge is to participatively design a system that encourages organizations and people to behave in a way that genuinely satisfies people’s needs in the long term.

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27 We thank Mark Cerin and Tonya Stebbins for helpful discussions concerning this section.

tions), depending on the person and situation. A boycott might have a connotation of illegality or unfairness in some circles and a connotation of empowerment in others.

Semiotics is a huge field with its own terminology and ways of viewing the world. Our aim here is to indicate what insights can be drawn from the field for the purpose of developing effective nonviolent strategies against repression, aggression, and oppression.

The study of meaning provides an essential complement (or challenge) to the transmission model, which looks at the transmission of messages with no built-in attention to what meanings are involved. It does little good to ensure that a message gets from A to B if the meaning as interpreted by B is quite different from what A intended to convey. This is an obvious point, but can easily be overlooked in efforts to “get the message out.”

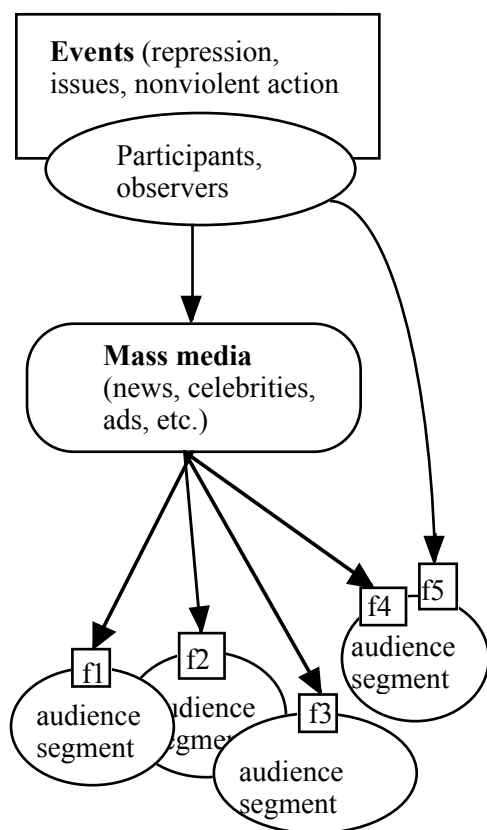
Whereas media effects theory assumes that the impact of messages from the mass media are similar, cultural studies researchers, who use semiotics as a standard tool, emphasize differences in response to the same message. Messages may be ignored, challenged, or transformed for different uses, though there are limits to what is likely and possible. Figure 6.4 illustrates this point, showing “audience segments” — some of which may be as small as one person — that respond differently to messages from the mass media. In a sense, each audience segment has its own “filter” for interpreting and transforming the message.

There is an enormous scope for application of semiotics to nonviolent action. Gene Sharp lists 54 different methods of nonviolent protest and persuasion, which are classified as symbolic action.<sup>28</sup> They include public speeches, banners, skywriting, mock awards, wearing of symbols, protest disrobings, symbolic sounds, vigils, pilgrimages, demonstrative funerals, teach-ins, renouncing honors,

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28 Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973), pp. 117–182.

and many others.<sup>29</sup> In each case the role of meaning is crucial. Semiotics potentially provides a means for understanding the creation of meaning in past events and for developing more effective actions.



**Figure 6.4.**

**Illustration of different responses to a similar message from the mass media. The interpretive filters of audience segments are shown as f1, etc. Audiences can also receive messages directly, with a different filter, as shown by f5.**

However, despite a vast literature in linguistics and cultural studies drawing on semiotics, there is very little to be found that explicitly addresses the concerns of nonviolent

activists.<sup>30</sup> The classic work in nonviolent action is Gene Sharp's massive book *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, but there is no corresponding work that might be called *The Semiotics of Nonviolent Action* or perhaps, more alliteratively, *Satyagraha Semiotics*. Why not? It is possible to speculate that cultural studies researchers, with their postmodernist rejection of universal narratives, are not attracted to the area of nonviolent action which is commonly underpinned by a belief that certain problems (such as genocide, war, and oppression) can be unambiguously identified and should be opposed. A simpler explanation is that nonviolent action is "off the agenda" for most scholars and that it just happens that no activist-oriented semioticians have yet delved into the area. Another factor is that cultural studies researchers often analyze what appears in the mass media and, since

30 There are some relevant articles, for example David William Low, "The greenie genre: noble saviours or planetary fools," *Australian Journal of Communication*, Vol. 23, No. 2, 1996, pp. 101–109.

A good example of discourse analysis oriented to activist concerns, though not directly related to nonviolent action, is studies of how citizens testified against a pulp mill in Canada, challenging experts: Mary Richardson, Joan Sherman and Michael Gismondi, *Winning Back the Words: Confronting Experts in an Environmental Public Hearing* (Toronto: Garamond, 1993); Joan Sherman and Michael Gismondi, "Jock talk, goldfish, horse logging and star wars," *Alternatives Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 1, Winter 1997, pp. 14–20.

It is possible that nonviolent activists could gain insights from some cultural studies analyses that give much more attention to violence than nonviolence, such as Begoña Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence: Women, Nationalism, and Political Subjectivity in Northern Ireland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), Chris Hables Gray, *Postmodern War: The New Politics of Conflict* (London: Routledge, 1997), and Carolyn Nordstrom and Antonius C. G. M. Robben (eds.), *Fieldwork under Fire: Contemporary Studies of Violence and Survival* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). We thank an anonymous referee for comments relating to this point.

29 Methods of noncooperation and intervention also involve issues of meaning. However, creation of meaning is more central to symbolic actions.

violence is featured far more prominently than nonviolence, give little attention to nonviolence. Deconstruction, after all, involves taking apart what exists and gives scant attention to constructing alternatives.

Much of the scholarly literature using semiotics is very difficult to understand, and the gulf between theory and activist application appears enormous. But studies with practical relevance are certainly possible, given that semiotic analysis is regularly used by advertisers. Just as technological development for defense is oriented by massive military expenditure with virtually none for social defense, so semiotic development is shaped largely by scholarly and commercial imperatives, with little attention to activist concerns.<sup>31</sup> Given the shortage of relevant studies, we restrict ourselves here to outlining some possible applications of semiotics to nonviolent struggles.

**Anti-advertising.** Advertising is a central feature of contemporary capitalism, providing both the practical means for promoting commercial goods and services as well as conditioning people to think in terms of commodities as solutions to all problems. Campaigns to challenge advertising offer a means of challenging capitalism. Some actions are based on noncooperation, for example when individuals put "No junk mail" notices on mail boxes and when organizations refuse corporate sponsorships. However, since the deeper effects of advertising are psychological, some of the most potent challenges aim to undermine standard meanings attached to ads. Defacing billboards can be a creative exercise in altering meanings. Cigarette ads have been prime targets.

In 1979 a group of Australian activists calling themselves BUGA UP (Billboard Utilizing Graffitiists Against Unhealthy Promotions) took to "refacing" billboards, using

spray cans. Sometimes they changed the wording very minimally, sometimes they made very elaborate changes to both the text and illustrations, but always the original meanings were challenged and replaced by others. For instance, Benson and Hedges sought to appeal to upwardly mobile people who liked to be seen as having good taste. One common advertisement for these cigarettes showed a famous painting. BUGA UP added the text: "What's this, a Van Cough?"

Although most BUGA UP targets were tobacco billboards, the group also challenged advertisements for other unhealthy products such as Coca-Cola. One billboard, enticing young people to "Smile ... with Coke" and showing young beautiful people, obviously part of the "in crowd", with flashing smiles and drinking Coca Cola, had some of the teeth blacked out by BUGA UP. This both undermined the alleged beauty which Coke was suggested to be conferring and reminded observers of Coca Cola's high sugar content, detrimental for teeth. Sexist advertisements were also targeted, with an advertisement for Lace Perfects panties, claiming to be "the Perfect Billboard," changed to read "the Pervert Billboard."

Other similar groups started up elsewhere. In London there was COUGHIN (Campaign on the Utilization of Graffiti for Health in the Neighborhood) and in Bristol AGHAST (Action Group to Halt Advertising and Sponsorship of Tobacco).<sup>32</sup>

More recently a Canadian group called Adbusters started up. It runs "subvertisements" to expose consumerism. *Adbusters* magazine details how advertising practices work and offers "culture jamming" strategies, as well as running parodies of advertisements, such as one for Nike which includes information about the appalling conditions under which Nike shoes are made in Third World

31 On military influences on communication theory, see Christopher Simpson, *Science of Coercion: Communication Research and Psychological Warfare 1945-1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

32 Bobbie Jacobson, *Beating the Ladykillers: Women and Smoking* (London: Pluto, 1986), p. 134.

countries. Adbusters have also promoted Buy Nothing Day.<sup>33</sup>

Defaced ads and caricatures of ads are potent symbolic challenges to the commercial culture. Many of the activists who undertake this have a brilliant intuitive grasp of how to best disrupt conventional interpretations of advertising messages. Surely semiotic analysis could contribute insight here, not just to decode ads<sup>34</sup> but to give guidance on how best to challenge standard meanings and create alternative meanings. At a grander scale, analysis could be undertaken to suggest which ads are the best targets for the purpose of questioning commercialism altogether, or building greater support for alternatives to capitalism.

### ***The meaning of violence and nonviolence.***

Nonviolence scholars have devoted considerable labors to classifying types of violent and nonviolent action and to discussing the most appropriate terminology. However, much of this work is oriented to scholarly purposes, with a primary aim being clarity of conceptualization as a foundation for further analysis and insight. It is not designed specifically for practical use. Sharp's classification of types of nonviolent action — symbolic action, noncooperation, and intervention, with various subcategories — is an exception, in that it has proved valuable for both intellectual and activist uses.

In the early 1970s, Monica Blumenthal and colleagues investigated attitudes to violence by surveying over 1000 US men. Among their revealing findings were that more than half the men thought that burning draft cards was violence and more than half thought that police shooting looters was not violence. The researchers concluded that "American men tend to define acts of dissent as 'violence' when they perceived the dissenters as undesir-

able people."<sup>35</sup> In other words, many of the US men used the label "violent" when they thought something was bad and "nonviolent" when they thought it was good. This is a dramatic contrast to the way nonviolence researchers use the words, namely "violent" for actions that hurt or destroy and "nonviolent" for actions that do not. Researchers try to avoid mixing judgment and meaning.

Suzette Haden Elgin draws on Blumenthal et al.'s findings to propose a semantic breakdown of the word "violence" for US males as being marked by five features: [+fierce], [+strong], [+unnecessary], [+avoidable], and [+bad]. Elgin says that all five features need to be present before "violence" is seen as the appropriate word. If US males think that burning draft cards is avoidable and bad, then it should be labeled violent, whereas if shooting looters is seen as unavoidable, then it is not violent.<sup>36</sup>

Nonviolent activists are also tempted to mix judgement and meaning in speaking of violence and nonviolence. Gandhian nonviolence is conceived of as much more than an absence of physical violence, but rather a way of life committed to selflessness, service, and the search for Truth. A semantic analysis of "nonviolent action" as understood by Gandhians would include [+action], [-physical violence], [+good], and probably other fea-

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35 Monica D. Blumenthal, Robert L. Kahn, Frank M. Andrews, and Kendra B. Head, *Justifying Violence: Attitudes of American Men* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1972), p. 86.

36 Suzette Haden Elgin, *Success with the Gentle Art of Verbal Self-Defense* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989), p. 114. The semantic differential, as used for example by Blumenthal et al., is a standard method of investigation of features associated with words. In semiotic terms, the semantic differential is a way of studying the connotations that different people associate with words: see John Fiske, *Introduction to Communication Studies* (London: Routledge, 1990, 2nd ed), pp. 145–150. Elgin's semantic assessment is based on picking out characteristic connotations. Naturally, her assessment does not apply to every individual.

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33 Kalle Lasn, *Culture Jam: The Uncooling of America*™ (New York: Eagle Brook, 1999).

34 Judith Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (London: Marion Boyars, 1978).

tures. (A survey or an analysis of usage would be needed to make a full assessment.) Gandhians would be reluctant to refer to circulation of a leaflet advocating racial discrimination as “nonviolent action” even though this involves no physical violence. Activists refer to their own rallies, sit-ins, and strikes as nonviolent but do not normally think of any actions by corporations, such as withdrawal of capital investment (a “capital strike”), as nonviolent.

The term “structural violence,” used by peace researcher Johan Galtung<sup>37</sup> to refer to systems of oppression that cause harm without the necessity of direct physical attack — such as starvation resulting from the operation of capitalism — seems to have found a receptive audience among activists, perhaps because it applies the label “violence,” with all its connotations, to complex systems.<sup>38</sup>

If many US men have one conception of violence and nonviolent activists have quite a different one, this is fertile territory for further investigation. Given the divergent meanings attached to “violence” and “nonviolence,” are there alternatives that would serve activists better, especially when it is necessary to communicate to wider audiences? Is there any good alternative to the term “nonviolence,” which unfortunately attempts to define something through a negative? Is there any way to fully eradicate the misleading term “passive resistance” which has not been used by nonviolent activists for decades but keeps popping into discussions?<sup>39</sup>

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37 See, for example, Johan Galtung, *The True Worlds: A Transnational Perspective* (New York: Free Press, 1980).

38 This conclusion is our own observation on talking to and corresponding with nonviolent activists.

39 Gandhi originally used the then-standard expression “passive resistance” but dropped it in the 1920s. He and his followers have tried to exorcise it ever since. Nonviolent activists use the term “nonviolent action,” which emphasizes action — the antithesis of passivity — as does Sharp in all his writing. Yet it is our experience that many people unfamiliar with the area come up with the expression “passive resistance.” It is not clear

Whereas it may be suitable for scholars to choose terms that avoid mixing meanings and judgements, for activists a more suitable goal may be to select terms that combine meanings and judgements in the most effective fashion for activist goals. Words with positive connotations are likely candidates. Activists do not control meanings but their choices have some impact.

Semiotic analysis could also provide more detailed guidance. What terms or other symbols are best for recruiting new members to action groups or attracting attendance at events? What symbolic constructions serve best to encourage nonviolent discipline at actions? What conceptual frameworks are best for building solidarity in a major campaign? What logos, slogans, and T-shirts should be chosen? What types of dress and behavior are most effective for winning over allies? In selecting the focus for a campaign, what target or goal has the greatest symbolic resonance? Issues of meaning pervade nonviolent struggles. Activists have come up with their own practical solutions. Semiotic analysis may or may not be able to provide improvements, but it is surely worth trying.

## Medium theory

What difference does it make whether messages about repression, aggression, and oppression, or between activists, are conveyed face to face, by telephone, in a newspaper, on television, or via e-mail? There are several ways to approach this question. We pick out two approaches here, which can be associated

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where this comes from. For a discussion of the change in terminology, and an argument for resurrecting the expression “passive resistance,” at least as an etymological tool for investigating pre-Gandhian nonviolent action, see Steven Duncan Huxley, *Constitutionalist Insurgency in Finland: Finnish “Passive Resistance” against Russification as a Case of Nonmilitary Struggle in the European Resistance Tradition* (Helsinki: Finnish Historical Society, 1990).

with the pioneering scholars Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan.<sup>40</sup>

Harold Innis developed a sweeping analysis of civilization in terms of information monopolies. When a society's elites have control over information, they are better able to exercise control. Part of the power of the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages stemmed from its exclusive control over religious information and hence its interpretation. The printing press helped break this monopoly and enable a challenge to the Church. A more recent example is the Soviet Union, in which the Communist Party exercised control over the expression of political views, especially through newspapers, books, radio, and television. Because unauthorized reproduction of information was a threat to the regime, new information technologies could not be fully exploited since they opened the gates for expression of dissident views. For example, foreign broadcasts had to be jammed and guards were needed around photocopiers (incidentally providing potent symbols of censorship). This restriction on open information exchange hindered the development of the Soviet economy and can be seen as one factor in the collapse of the state socialist system.

Following in the footsteps of Innis, but with a narrower focus, we can examine which communication technologies are most useful for supporting repression, aggression, and oppression and which are most useful to nonviolent activists.<sup>41</sup> In the 1991 Soviet coup, the mass media were taken over by the coup leaders. Although opponents were able to undermine the dominant message in some cases — by including certain stories in newspapers or providing revealing shots on television — by and large it can be said that the mass media were a great advantage to the

coup leaders. In contrast, opponents used e-mail, graffiti, leaflets, and word of mouth to great advantage, suggesting that these sorts of media are more useful to nonviolent activists.

In the anti-MAI campaign, e-mail and the web were key tools internationally, supplemented by telephone in local organizing. In the early stages of the campaign, the mass media were largely uninterested in or impervious to critical views about the MAI. Only after considerable opposition had developed, facilitated by the net, was there much mass media coverage.

The Indonesian government under Suharto used information management as a central element in its authoritarian rule, with censorship of the mass media. In the development of opposition in 1998, word of mouth was crucial, supplemented by e-mail.

In each of these three cases, mass media were tools of the dominant groups, with opponents only able to use them in marginal ways. In contrast, communication face to face and by e-mail was extremely valuable to opponents. This is a pattern found in many other struggles, and is readily explained.

Mass media — especially television, radio, and large newspapers — are means of communication in which a small number of people control what is conveyed to a very large number of people. They are “one-directional”: messages controlled by a few flow to many others, with little return flow. Therefore they are ideally designed for control by elites, of which repressive governments are the archetypal example. It is for this reason that in a military coup, one of the first tasks is to capture television and radio stations.<sup>42</sup> In as much as people are dependent on mass media for their understandings of political reality — as in the model of mass society discussed earlier — control over the mass media provides a powerful means of manipulating and controlling the population.

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40 Our framework here draws on the convenient overview by Joshua Meyrowitz, “Medium theory,” in David Crowley and David Mitchell (eds.), *Communication Theory Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), pp. 50–77.

41 Brian Martin, “Communication technology and nonviolent action,” *Media Development*, Vol. 43, No. 2, 1996, pp. 3–9.

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42 T. E. Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1962); Edward Luttwak, *Coup d'Etat: A Practical Handbook*, (London: Allen Lane, 1968).

In contrast, technologies that allow people to communicate with each other independently of central control and on a one-to-one or small group basis provide the most secure basis for resistance to repression, aggression, and oppression. Face-to-face conversation is a model for this sort of communication; technological mediations include the post, leaflets, telephone, fax, short-wave radio, CB radio, and e-mail. There are various ways to characterize such media, including networks (or network media), decentralized media, and one-to-one media.

Of course, the existence of network media does not guarantee communication for liberation. After all, the telephone and e-mail are widely used by military forces and, more generally, they can be used for intimidation as well as dialogue. Furthermore, dominant groups attempt to control these media, for example by restriction, regulation, and surveillance. In the Soviet Union, surveillance of telephone conversations was commonplace. In the United States and other countries, government regulation has hindered the development of community radio, and micropower radio was made illegal, with challengers subject to government harassment.<sup>43</sup> The connection between media form and power is one of tendency and potential rather than necessity. Mass media are more likely to be useful to elites and network media are more likely to be useful to grassroots activists, but the actual connections depend on particular circumstances.

From this analysis of media, several important lessons can be drawn. First, nonviolent activists should not rely on mass media to get their message out. While access to the mass media is incredibly powerful, it is precarious, precisely because mass media are so easily

controlled from the top. Therefore, while it is certainly worthwhile to make great efforts to use the mass media when possible, it is wise to make provision for getting the message out in other ways. In this, network media should be the prime focus of attention.

Second, activists need to think beyond simply using existing media; they need to develop policy for communication technology. Technologies do not simply develop of their own accord, but are the product of intense investigation, development, investment, and promotion.<sup>44</sup> The dominant forces behind the introduction of communication technologies are governments and large corporations, with the primary considerations being control and profit. Fortunately, some technologies that are introduced have liberatory aspects. Rather than just using what becomes available, activists can seek to actively intervene in the process of technological choice and innovation. This is not easy but is necessary for the long-term project of building a society that can defend itself nonviolently.

A second approach to media is that pioneered by Marshall McLuhan, who saw media as extensions of human senses.<sup>45</sup> Communication through the human sense of sight has different characteristics than communication through hearing; hence, communication through television has differ-

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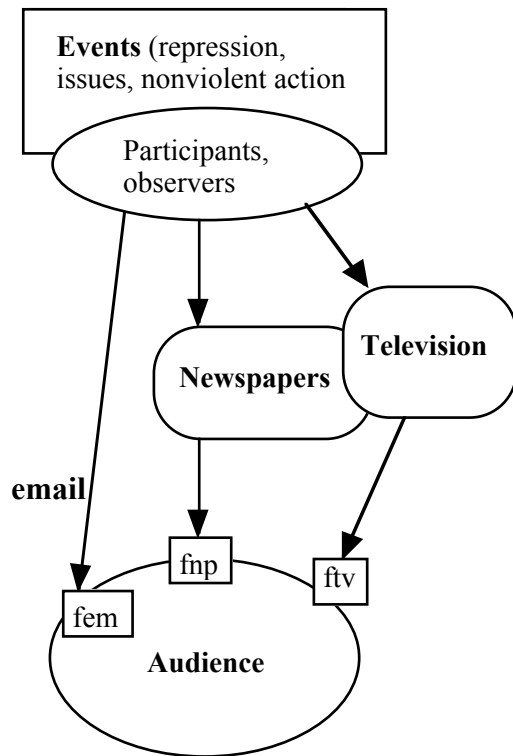
43 Peter M. Lewis and Jerry Booth, *The Invisible Medium: Public, Commercial and Community Radio* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989); Ron Sakolsky and Stephen Dunifer (eds.), *Seizing the Airwaves: A Free Radio Handbook* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1998); Lawrence Soley, *Free Radio: Electronic Civil Disobedience* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1999).

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44 On the values involved in technology, see for example Michael Goldhaber, *Reinventing Technology: Policies for Democratic Values* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986); Richard E. Sclove, *Democracy and Technology* (New York: Guilford Press, 1995). On the social movements behind the introduction of computers — a process which is normally seen as resulting from technological and efficiency considerations alone — see Rob Kling and Suzanne Iacono, "The mobilization of support for computerization: the role of computerization movements," *Social Problems*, Vol. 35, No. 3, June 1988, pp. 226–243.

45 Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962); Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

ent characteristics than communication through radio. To some extent, the nature of the medium shapes or overlays the content of the message, as dramatized in McLuhan's famous aphorism "The medium is the message" (or the later "the medium is the message"). This is represented in Figure 6.5, in which each medium has its own filter.



**Figure 6.5. An audience responding differently to different media, with filter "fem" for e-mail and so forth**

It is useful to activists to be aware that a style of message that works well in print may be unsuitable for television and that, in general, messages should be tailored for the medium, while media should be chosen for their potential to carry certain types of messages as well as the "message" built into the medium itself. However, beyond this general insight, in medium theory it is hard to find specific guidance for activists. To publicize repression in Indonesia or some other country, what is the most suitable medium: television, radio, or newspapers,

assuming in each case a message appropriately styled for the medium? Of course, activists seldom have ready access to mass media, so this question is hypothetical. But the choice can be made meaningful by looking at what activists can produce, including leaflets, articles, audio cassettes, and video cassettes, which can be circulated to individuals and played at meetings. For example, Noam Chomsky has written many books and articles, many of which deal with repression and the role of elites in fostering it or allowing it to continue.<sup>46</sup> Chomsky is also available on audio cassette and there is a film featuring him, *Manufacturing Consent*. Which medium is most effective for providing understanding? Which is most effective for generating concern? Which stimulates the most action? These questions are of great significance to activists. There is a great deal of informal knowledge about what is thought to work best in certain situations or for certain individuals, but we know of no studies addressing these questions systematically.

The question of the "choice" of medium is made more difficult by the reality that the biggest impact can come from mass media, which are not freely available to activists on their own terms. This applies as well to sympathetic journalists, who cannot run any story they like. Crusading journalist John Pilger, who has tried for decades to expose Western government complicity in atrocities in East Timor through both film and print, and who has had an enormous impact, has never had anything approaching full access to the mainstream media and indeed has come under fierce attack by ideological opponents. Therefore, the issue of choice of medium is complicated by questions of access and size of audience.

The choice of medium is perhaps especially important when addressing absence of action. If there are massacres occurring somewhere but no coverage in the mass media, activists have to use their own channels. Which is

46 For example, Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *The Political Economy of Human Rights* (Boston: South End Press, 1979).



likely to be more effective for generating concern and mobilizing action: videos, audio cassettes, articles in newsletters, e-mail circulars, or public meetings? Is there some optimal combination? How much does the choice depend on the nature of the repression, aggression, or oppression? (Are photo opportunities available?) The answers to such questions depend on a range of factors besides characteristics of different media, including opportunities for gaining information, production skills, and financial and human resources. Medium theory potentially has much to offer, but so far little appears to have been done.

Activists can improve their chances of communicating effectively if they know their audience really well: what they do, how they think, what communication media they use and trust, and what moves them to action.<sup>47</sup> With this sort of in-depth knowledge, a more informed choice of medium can be made.

### Political economy

The ownership and control of media have a big impact on their potential to be used to oppose repression, aggression, and oppression. Most mass media are owned by governments or large corporations, and all are regulated by governments. There is a large body of writing about media monopolies and their influence on what is published and broadcast.<sup>48</sup> Powerful

groups can intervene to block or curtail coverage of unwelcome stories; corporations may threaten to withdraw advertising, while governments can threaten legislative reprisals or just loss of journalistic access. Government-owned media are frequently subject to direct censorship or undertake their own self-censorship to pre-empt reprisals. Most of all, media corporations seldom report critically about themselves. In short, media empires, whether government or corporate, have enormous political and economic power, a fact that influences the sort of stories that are run.

One obvious consequence is that capitalist media are pro-capitalist, in quite a number of ways. Stories critical of capitalism, or describing the advantages of alternative economic systems, are scarce. There are numerous business stories, all of which assume the importance of business, and few stories from workers' points of view. There are vast amounts of both overt advertising — clearly defined advertisements — and covert advertising, in the form of stories based on corporate public relations,<sup>49</sup> corporate-sponsored “advertorials”, spin-doctoring (interventions to include or exclude certain material),<sup>50</sup> and cash-for-comment deals (in which columnists or commentators receive covert payments in return for making apparently

47 We thank an anonymous referee for this point.

48 See especially the now classic treatment by Ben H. Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997, 5th edition). Hard-hitting attacks on corporate domination of information and culture, focusing on the US, include Robert W. McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Herbert I. Schiller, *Culture, Inc.: The Corporate Takeover of Public Expression* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Gerald Sussman, *Communication, Technology, and Politics in the Information Age* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997). For a propaganda model of the media, based on the five filters of ownership, advertising, sourcing from powerful organizations, attacks on

unwelcome programs, and anticommunism, see Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon, 1988). For global perspectives, see Cees J. Hamelink, *Trends in World Communication: On Disempowerment and Self-Empowerment* (Penang: Southbound and Third World Network, 1994) and Edward S. Herman and Robert W. McChesney, *The Global Media: The New Missionaries of Global Capitalism* (London: Cassell, 1997). For many other sources, see James R. Bennett, *Control of the Media in the United States: An Annotated Bibliography* (Hamden, CT: Garland, 1992).

49 Stuart Ewen, *PR! A Social History of Spin* (New York: Basic Books, 1996).

50 David Michie, *The Invisible Persuaders: How Britain's Spin Doctors Manipulate the Media* (London: Bantam, 1998).

sincere endorsements). So it is no surprise that opposition to the MAI received little attention in the mass media until well down the track after activists had mobilized significant grass-roots concern.

The political economy approach is most valuable in examining the influence of powerful interest groups on media dynamics. For example, in the 1990s the governments of Serbia and Croatia controlled the dominant mass media through a variety of means, such as restricting competition and pushing out dissident journalists, and used them to powerful effect to promote national chauvinism, while allowing a marginal dissident media with little impact. The Serbian and Croatian media used selective reporting and disinformation to serve their respective governments' positions, and were a key tool for the two governments' forging of centralized power and pursuit of war aims.<sup>51</sup> Another example, on a lesser scale, was the concerted attempt to discredit Arthur Scargill, President of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and the most prominent trade unionist in Britain, which involved the Conservative government, the spy agency MI5, and media proprietors, editors, and journalists who were willing to lie and then, as facts appeared, move on to new lies. The Scargill affair is best understood as part of the Conservative government's campaign to destroy the NUM.<sup>52</sup>

While political economy has great value for analyzing the dynamics of the mass media, it also has significant limitations. Understanding patterns of ownership and control at the top gives insight into driving forces but is too blunt to grasp what happens on a day-to-day basis in news rooms (something we will

address under organizational theory below). Political economy is good at explaining hegemony — the dominance of certain ways of thinking — but not so good at explaining resistance. Specifically, political economy helps to explain absence of action, for example the relative absence of action against advertising, but is weak at providing clues for generating action. In short, political economy gives little guidance to activists on how to generate concern about repression, aggression, and oppression.

If powerful groups control the mass media, one implication is that activists should not rely on these media, but instead use and promote alternative media such as community radio, the alternative press, leaflets, telephone, and e-mail, that are not so easily controlled centrally.<sup>53</sup> This conclusion is exactly the same as that drawn from medium theory. Medium theory shows that mass media are more easily controlled by elites; political economy documents the empirical reality of this control.

## Organizational theory

The different theories we have canvassed so far give a variety of insights into barriers to communication. The transmission model readily captures physical barriers such as seizing of a transmitter. Media effects theory helps explain the passivity of audiences in the face of information. Semiotics points to processes of meaning creation that can vary from issue to issue and person to person. Medium theory shows that some types of media are more

51 Mark Thompson, *Forging War: The Media in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Hercegovina* (Luton: University of Luton Press, 1999). For a similar case, see Article 19 [Linda Kirschke], *Broadcasting Genocide: Censorship, Propaganda and State-Sponsored Violence in Rwanda 1990–1994* (London: Article 19, 1996).

52 Seumas Milne, *The Enemy Within: MI5, Maxwell and the Scargill Affair* (London: Verso, 1994).

53 Tony Downmunt (ed.), *Channels of Resistance: Global Television and Local Empowerment* (London: British Film Institute in association with Channel Four Television, 1993); John Downing, *Radical Media: The Political Experience of Alternative Communication* (Boston: South End Press, 1984); Bruce Girard (ed.), *A Passion for Radio: Radio Waves and Community* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1992); Edward Herman, "Democratic media," *Z Papers*, Vol. 1, No. 1, January-March 1992, pp. 23–30; Sakolsky and Dunifer, *Seizing the Airwaves*; Soley, *Free Radio*; Williams, *Grassroots Journalism*.

useful for elites and others more useful for dissidents. Political economy highlights the power of those who own and control media to shape messages. If we look at a diagram of potential information flow from events of concern to members of audiences who might take action, the different theories provide insights at a range of points along the way. Two areas that still require examination are portrayed as the boxes “mass media” and “government,” acting as filters between events and recipients. To delve into what happens in these boxes, we turn to organizational theory.

Within any organization, some sorts of messages are easier to convey than others. Within families, for example, members have deep understandings about each other and group dynamics that have been cultivated from birth. A “message” can be interpreted in a particular family unerringly whereas the same message in another family would be meaningless. While watching television, particular tone of voice by one individual may signal pleasure; another may indicate a wish to switch channels. While preparing breakfast, a certain smile by an individual may suggest an interest in talking, whereas a certain movement of shoulders may mean “leave me alone.” Family members are especially adept at reading danger signs when an individual is likely to verbally abuse or physically assault others.

While some “messages,” invisible or very subtle to outsiders, are read easily, there are usually areas of discourse that are off limits within families. Topics that are not discussed might include a child’s low self-esteem, parents’ unequal attention for different children, habits in the bathroom, certain decisions about money and jobs, or sexual fantasies. Sometimes dialogue is denied by assertions that there is nothing to discuss, as when parents say “We love you all equally,” precluding a discussion of perceptions of unequal love.

So, inside a family, communication can be amazingly subtle and precise in some areas and be denied or blocked off entirely in others. A family member may find things quite different in other circumstances, for example with

friends, co-workers, or complete strangers, finding some family-specific understandings unavailable but being able to discuss certain topics openly that are off limits in the family.

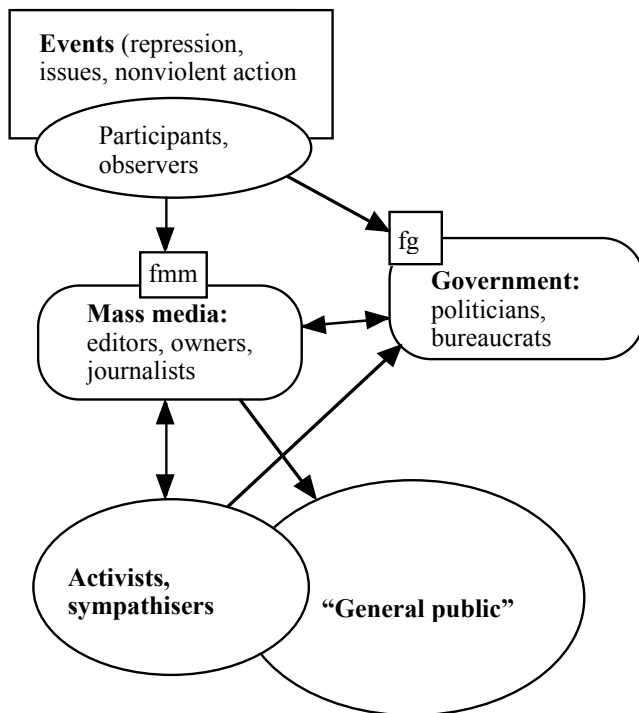
Thus we may say that the family is an environment that acts as a communication filter, facilitating some messages while blocking others. Alternatively, the family can be said to be a framework for meaning construction, providing tools for understanding certain types of messages (including very subtle and family-specific ones) while lacking tools for grasping other types of messages. The key point is that the family, as an organizational unit, is not a neutral conveyor of messages and meanings. Quite the contrary: messages and meanings are shaped by the family environment, in all stages from creation to interpretation and action in response.

Organizational theory proposes that communication is shaped by an organization’s structure and dynamics. Besides families, this applies to corporations, government departments, trade unions, churches, sporting clubs, and activist groups. There is great potential value in applying this approach to problems of communication about repression, aggression, and oppression. Groups undertaking nonviolent action need to understand their own internal communication dynamics as well as the way they filter messages received and the way they construct messages to others. However, we are not aware of much work done along these lines. Hence we concentrate on two areas where there is research and where there are obvious implications for communicating about repression, aggression, and oppression: groupthink in government bodies and news values in the mass media.

Figure 6.6 illustrates the processes involved. The mass media and government each filter incoming information and, through their organizational dynamics, shape their outputs. Filters should be assumed at the end of all arrows in the figure.

**Groupthink.** Irving Janis in his classic book *Groupthink* argued that several major disasters in US foreign policy were due to a cohesive group of government decision makers aligning

their thoughts around a single way of thinking and excluding dissenting views. He called this phenomenon “groupthink,” which he defined as “a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members’ strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action.”<sup>54</sup>



**Figure 6.6. Government and mass media as communication filters. The filters are the result of psychological, organizational, and political economy factors.**

For example, in the lead-up to the 1961 US-sponsored invasion of Cuba, US president John F. Kennedy and his closest advisers became convinced that the invasion would be a success. Contrary information, for example, intelligence reports that there was little support within Cuba for a challenge to the Cuban government led by Fidel Castro, was rejected.

The invasion, at the Bay of Pigs, was quickly defeated, resulting in a propaganda victory for Castro, a major embarrassment for Kennedy, and the consequence of driving Cuba towards the Soviet Union.

Within the policy-making elite, there was no shortage of information: reports and critical perspectives casting serious doubt on assumptions underlying the invasion were readily available. The problem was not lack of information, but rather a systematic rejection of information and ideas that ran contrary to the prevailing consensus, which was maintained through an illusion of invulnerability and unanimity and by suppression of personal doubts and those of others. A certain way of viewing the world had become dominant — in this case, a belief that the Cuban government was detested and fragile and that the invasion would not fail or rebound against the US government — and was not easily dislodged by contrary information or viewpoints.

Every person interprets the world through a set of assumptions or filters, screening out incompatible information. That is essential if one is to draw a conclusion or take an action. Groupthink is simply the same process operating with a group of people who, through a collective process, develop a common framework for understanding the world. There is nothing unusual about this: it goes on all the time. Janis highlighted foreign policy fiascoes that sometimes result from this process, but his concept of groupthink applies in many other situations.

Groupthink is to be expected in any group, and is especially likely in bureaucratically structured organizations, characterized by hierarchy and a division of labor.<sup>55</sup> In bureaucracies, orders are communicated down the hierarchy and information communicated

<sup>54</sup> Irving L. Janis, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies in Policy Decisions and Fiascoes* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983, 2nd ed), p. 9.

<sup>55</sup> We use here the sociological conception of bureaucracy, in which characteristic features are hierarchy, division of labor, standard operating procedures and rules, advancement by merit, and impersonal relations between workers. In this sense, most large corporations, churches, and environmental groups are bureaucracies just as much as government bodies.

upwards, with little genuine dialogue. Although information flows upward, it is often tailored to what workers think bosses want to hear. Therefore the top management may have a very distorted view of conditions at the coal face. Thus, in a hierarchical organization, communication is structured by the hierarchy, a process that has serious ramifications.<sup>56</sup>

The problems of communicating “against the hierarchy” are shown by the fate of whistleblowers, who are workers who speak out, typically about corruption or dangers to the public.<sup>57</sup> A typical whistleblower is a conscientious worker who discovers a problem — such as misuse of funds, bias in promotions, violations of procedures, or cheating of clients — and reports it through proper channels, such as notifying the boss or using a grievance procedure. However, the whistleblower’s communication is unwelcome since it challenges established ways of doing things and sometimes threatens to expose crime, negligence, or incompetence by managers. Hence, the usual response by management is to attack the whistleblower, with reprisals including ostracism, threats, petty harassment, reprimands, punitive transfer, and dismissal. Rather than deal with the message, the response is to “shoot the messenger.” For a whistleblower’s charges to be taken seriously,

with proper investigation and penalties for wrongdoers, would be a major threat to the hierarchy, since it would mean that information from lower down could be used to undermine those higher up.

Groupthink is one way in which those with power in organizations protect against challengers. Dissenting views are ruled out of bounds by the prevailing way of thinking.<sup>58</sup> This allows whistleblowers to be crushed with a clean conscience — they are simply workers who do not understand how things work. It also allows a wide range of other disconcerting information to be filtered out, such as that morale is poor due to bad management, that executive salaries are undeserved, or that sexual harassment is rife.

From the point of view of mobilizing concern about repression, aggression, and oppression, various organizations act as filters along the communication chain. An organization may receive information: the question is what to do about it. For example, consider a church that receives information about Indonesian repression in East Timor.<sup>59</sup> This might be via the mass media, through letters from an East Timor support group, or from church members who raise the issue in discussion. There are various things that could be done by the church:

- distribute information to all members;
- address the issue in a church service;
- make a formal statement, circulated to the media;
- encourage other churches to take a stand;

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56 Fred Emery and Merrelyn Emery, *A Choice of Futures* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), pp. 150–165. The authoritarian dynamics of large organizations have long been known, with Michels’ “iron law of oligarchy” being a classic treatment: Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracies*, translated by Eden & Cedar Paul (New York: Dover, [1915] 1959).

57 David W. Ewing, *Freedom Inside the Organization: Bringing Civil Liberties to the Workplace* (New York: Dutton, 1977); Myron Peretz Glazer and Penina Migdal Glazer, *The Whistleblowers: Exposing Corruption in Government and Industry* (New York: Basic Books, 1989); Marcia P. Miceli and Janet P. Near, *Blowing the Whistle: The Organizational and Legal Implications for Companies and Employees* (New York: Lexington Books, 1992).

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58 On the psychological dynamics of bureaucracies, in particular the interaction of hierarchy and employee psychology, see Robert Jackall, *Moral Mazes: The World of Corporate Managers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Howard S. Schwartz, *Narcissistic Process and Corporate Decay: The Theory of the Organization Ideal* (New York: New York University Press, 1990).

59 In practice, the Catholic Church was one of the main routes for getting information out of East Timor during the period of greatest Indonesian government control over outside media, 1975–1989.

- provide financial support for East Timorese victims of repression;
- invite church representatives from East Timor to visit;
- provide asylum for East Timorese refugees;
- support protests against Indonesian repression.

These are just a sample of possible actions; the point is that there is no shortage of ways to expose and oppose the repression. Concerted action is most likely when it is supported by church leaders, but some actions can be taken on the initiative of church members or affiliate organizations.

On the other hand, it is also possible that nothing is done. This is the case that is our concern here. For example:

- information about repression is discounted as incorrect or misleading;
- information is set aside because church leaders do not consider repression in East Timor to be their concern;
- information is set aside because church leaders do not think there is anything they can do about repression in East Timor;
- information is not acted on because church leaders are afraid that action might generate opposition or bad publicity among members, the church hierarchy, media, the government, or some other group.

How can such lack of action be explained? Groupthink is one way: it captures the cohesiveness of perspective that can develop in a policy-making elite but also in all sorts of other organizations. Another term, adopted from the history of science, is “paradigm,” which has come to mean a dominant way of conceiving the world and guiding interactions with it.<sup>60</sup>

At a more general level, we can talk about the “social construction of reality,” namely the social processes that help to shape the way

people understand the world.<sup>61</sup> When people who have been blind from birth gain their sight through an operation, they cannot immediately “see,” since they have no way of conceptualizing the sensory inputs coming through their eyes. To decide whether something is a triangle, for example, they may have to count the number of points or sides. “Seeing” is a skill that must be learned, and since this learning takes place in an environment built on certain assumptions about the world, seeing is a social as well as a physical process. Much learning is required to understand the significance of the images on a television screen, for example. Africans who have lived their entire life in the forest may not be able to correctly interpret the visual panorama of open spaces, for example not believing that buffalo observed at a great distance are actually insects since, without trees for comparison, they appear to be tiny.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, viewing television requires a set of acquired skills.

If learning is required to make sense of sensory inputs — and assumptions about the nature of reality are involved at this level — then it should be no surprise that more complex conceptions, such as the dynamics of organizations, foreign policy, and human rights, are “social constructions.” Each person’s ideas about how the world operates are an outcome of personal experiences, prior learning, and, not least, the ideas of those with whom one interacts. It is to be expected that the organization where one works will have a strong influence on one’s conceptions of the world. Furthermore, it is to be expected that the dominant conceptual framework in an organization will reflect the interests of dominant individuals or groups both inside and outside the organization. This is the old idea that material conditions influence — though do not determine — conceptions of the

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60 Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970, 2nd ed).

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61 The classic statement is Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966).

62 Colin M. Turnbull, *The Forest People* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962), pp. 252–253.

world. Those who are rich are likely to believe that the economic system is fair and, through a complex set of processes, the idea that the economic system is fair is likely to become the dominant view, so that cheating by welfare recipients is seen as a serious offense whereas massive government handouts to the super-rich, or systemic corporate fraud, are ignored.

The social construction of reality is the most general process, applying to individuals, groups, and entire societies. Within this process, particular frameworks for understanding and dealing with the world, which can be called paradigms, develop and are perpetuated within specific domains. Organizations are important shapers of social reality, so many paradigms are specific to certain types of organizations. In a government department, we can talk of a "policy paradigm" that sees certain issues as unimportant or out of bounds and certain actions as inadmissible. Groupthink is perhaps a more appropriate term for smaller groups dealing with specific issues, whereas paradigm is more appropriate for deep-seated frameworks for understanding the world.

The options for action and explanations for non-action that we have outlined for a church apply as well to many other organizations including trade unions, corporations, government bodies, community service organizations (such as Rotary), and professional associations. From simple observation, it is apparent that most organizations do little or nothing against repression except sometimes when it is close to home. The usual assumption is that what is happening somewhere else to someone else is not our business. Action is much more likely when there is a bond or if authorities expect it.

In the case of a church, one powerful bond is when those subjected to repression are members of the same religion. Most of the East Timorese are Catholic, so it is to be expected that Catholics and Catholic churches around the world would be more likely to act than would Moslems, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, or Baptists. (This generalization needs to be qualified by the observation that some religious groups, such as Quakers, have a

record in social activism.) But for most Catholics, East Timor is far away, physically and mentally. Without some stronger link, it is easy to say that repression there is not our concern.

In Argentina, for example, Catholics would be much more concerned about attacks on Argentine Catholics. There is no historical link with East Timorese Catholics. In Portugal, though, there is a strong historical link, since East Timor was colonized by Portugal, which indeed is the main reason most East Timorese are Catholic.

Another possible connection would be an East Timorese refugee in an Argentine congregation, or an Argentine priest working in East Timor. Such personal links are powerful means of overcoming physical and psychological distance. They also illustrate the operation of the great chain of nonviolence.

Finally, there is the role of authorities. If the Pope takes a strong line on East Timor, this may encourage more churches to take stands themselves. With the backing of the Pope or the head of a country's Catholic church, a priest or church members are likely to have less difficulty taking initiatives. However, there are limits to the power of authoritative endorsement. In the Catholic church, the Pope's edicts no longer command automatic obedience.

In international affairs, another source of authority is the United Nations. In the case of East Timor, the General Assembly condemned the 1975 invasion and repeatedly condemned the Indonesian occupation. However, this did not cause the Indonesian government to withdraw. Unlike the case of Iraq, whose invasion of Kuwait led to a massive UN-endorsed military operation in 1990-1991, the UN took no action against the Indonesian invasion and occupation of East Timor until 1999, as described in chapter 2.

The most important source of legitimacy for action or non-action against repression remains governments. Other organizations can take action on their own but usually don't. But if called into action by their government, things are very different. This is most obvious in wartime. Corporations, for example, which

normally are happy to make a profit in any country, may be instructed to withdraw investments or to produce certain products. Even in so-called peacetime, government regulations and policies vis-a-vis other countries are strong factors in corporate decision making. Similar considerations apply to trade unions, community service organizations, professional associations, and many other organizations. Therefore special attention should be given to governments, especially foreign policy elites, as filters of information about repression, aggression, and oppression.

Exactly who are the foreign policy elites? This will depend on the issue, what political party is in power, insider networks, and personalities. They are likely to include a few key politicians, personal advisers, and government bureaucrats, especially diplomats. For example, in the period just before the Indonesian invasion of East Timor in December 1975, key Australian foreign policy elites included the Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, the Australian ambassador to Indonesia Richard Woolcott, the Minister for Foreign Affairs Don Willesee, and the head of the Department of Foreign Affairs Alan Renouf.<sup>63</sup>

In order to gain insight into government foreign policy elites as information filters, it is useful to try to elucidate elements of the policy paradigm underlying their operations. Policy paradigms are bound to be somewhat different between countries, historical periods, and even issues. To focus the discussion, we look at the sort of assumptions that can explain US and Australian foreign policy in relation to Indonesia from 1965 to 1998, characterized by open or de facto support for the Indonesian government even when it was responsible for massive killings and other human rights violations.

**Table 1**

**Elements of a foreign policy paradigm**

1. The influence of the foreign policy elites must be maintained.
2. Serving the interests of the government is the foremost consideration, subject to point 1.
3. Friendly foreign governments should be supported, subject to points 1 and 2.
4. Domestic corporate interests should be supported, subject to points 1 and 2 and sometimes 3.

This is essentially the paradigm of “real-politik,” in which international relations is a game of strategy in which power and influence are the key considerations and moral or humanitarian issues are primarily of symbolic rather than substantive importance.

Foreign policy elites, naturally enough, have developed a view of the world that puts them in a key position of power and influence. By keeping international relations a matter of government-to-government interaction, foreign policy elites maintain their own role. The United Nations is not a strong challenge to this model, since it is essentially a meeting place for states, where nongovernment groups are outsiders. US and Australian foreign policy elites supported the Suharto government in Indonesia for more than three decades because it was friendly to the West, namely anticommunist and open to Western investment.

Nonviolent action is potentially a deep challenge to the foreign policy paradigm. To challenge repression in Indonesia, a nonviolent action strategy would involve grassroots action within Indonesia plus grassroots support from outside the country through broadcasts, boycotts, personal links, and many other options. This would marginalize foreign policy elites: rather than being at the center of influence, they would be simply one player among a host of activists. Rather than interacting with elite counterparts in Indonesia, they would have to interact with workers, peasants, and imprisoned dissidents. A strategy to encourage nonviolent action against a foreign tyrant would provide skills to people that might be used to challenge the govern-

63 Rodney Tiffen, *Diplomatic Deceits: Government, Media and East Timor* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2001). Detailed analyses of foreign policy elites and their operations are unusual except for the most prominent issues. For a classic treatment of US policy making on Vietnam, see David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Random House, 1972).



ment at home, reducing its power and, in turn, the influence of the foreign policy elite. It is not surprising that the idea of social transformation through nonviolent action is unthinkable within the policy paradigm of *real-politik*.

The entire Cold War was waged using the conceptual framework of *real-politik*, with communist states treated as the enemy to be countered by military might. The 1989 revolutions in Eastern Europe were totally unexpected because the significance of nonviolent action was not grasped.

Let us now turn to the government as a communication filter. When it comes to foreign affairs, government pronouncements usually reflect the framework of foreign policy elites. Governments collect massive amounts of information, including diplomatic correspondence, spy reports, commercial information, news reports, and much else. All of this is interpreted through the foreign policy paradigm. So while lots of information goes into the government, what comes out is quite small by comparison and usually reflects the foreign policy orthodoxy. When it came to Indonesia, the US and Australian governments commented on government-to-government talks, and sometimes on investment issues, but seldom if ever reported on long-term political prisoners or exploitation of workers by multinational corporations.

Consider the case of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs<sup>64</sup> and Australian government policy on Indonesia. Ever since Suharto came to power in the late 1960s, the department pursued a line of support for the Indonesian government, including fostering high level diplomatic meetings, Australian corporate investment in Indonesia, Australian arms sales to the Indonesian military, training of Indonesian military officers, and, later, recognition of Indonesian sovereignty over East Timor. The basic premise of Foreign Affairs policy on East Timor was that keeping on good terms with the Indonesian government was the top priority. That it was an anticommunist, procapitalist government was

crucial in this alignment, but also involved seems to have been a desire to align the Australian government with other powerful governments, especially allies of the US government.

In this consistent policy over many decades, anything that threatened the Australia-Indonesia government alliance was ignored, downplayed, denigrated, or, if the pressure to act was too great, given lip service. The 1965-1966 bloodbath in Indonesia was largely ignored, as were Indonesian political prisoners and the practice of imprisonment without trial. Indonesian internal colonialist policy, involving repression of movements for independence or autonomy in East Timor, Irian Jaya, Aceh, and elsewhere, was supported. Suharto's repression of potential challengers and grassroots movements was accepted and its democratic facade left unchallenged. Exploitation of workers was ignored, as was massive corruption linked to Suharto.

The task of Foreign Affairs was not easy, since many voices within Australia challenged the government's policy of accommodation and appeasement. There was enormous popular support for the East Timorese cause, including a strong support from within the Australian Labor Party, with some parliamentarians taking a leading role. There was committed and persistent action groups supportive of freedom in Indonesia. There was media coverage of atrocities in East Timor and other regions (including the killing of five Australian journalists in 1975 by Indonesian soldiers), exposés of Indonesian corruption, and other abuses. In the face of popular agitation for change, Foreign Affairs worked hard to convince Australian governments to maintain its support for the Indonesian government, and was remarkably successful at this. Only in 1999 did this change. Following the overwhelming East Timorese vote for independence and the immediate Indonesian government-sponsored scorched earth policy, there was an enormous outpouring of concern and rage in Australia, aided by saturation media coverage, leading to a change in government policy that overturned the Foreign Affairs model.

64 The name of this department has varied; we use "Department of Foreign Affairs" for convenience.

It would be possible to go more deeply into how Foreign Affairs developed and maintained such a cohesive worldview about Indonesian foreign policy. This would involve a long tradition of anticommunism, the influence of a small number of pro-Indonesian government intellectuals who trained a whole generation of diplomats, elitism in the Australian public service — Foreign Affairs perceives itself as “superior” to most other departments — and the acquiescence by most cabinet ministers to department advice.<sup>65</sup> Also important is the role of dissident voices within Foreign Affairs, and how they have been silenced or marginalized.

It is time to step back from specifics and summarize what a study of organizations can reveal about communication about repression, aggression, and oppression. Communication in any organization is shaped by the structure of the organization: certain things are said easily and some not expressed at all. In a hierarchical organization, it is difficult to express viewpoints that challenge the interests of elites or question the hierarchical structure itself. In addition, organizational elites may have access to information unavailable to others, and have control over official statements from the organization. Communication is also shaped by the organization's environment, especially other organizations and controllers of or stakeholders in the organization itself. Communication practices tend to develop to reflect what aids the organization's survival in its current form in its environment. In the case of hierarchical organizations, this means interacting via elites, control over unofficial information transfer and acute sensitivity to what is required to maintain power and influence. Within the constraints and influences of organizational structure and environ-

ment, standard ways of understanding the world develop in any organization, which persist while being gradually modified by various influences such as new staff, environmental changes, and imposed structural changes. These standard ways of understanding constitute a socially constructed reality. At a general level, a cohesive framework of ideas and practices can be called a paradigm, while for making decisions about a particular purpose, cohesiveness can be called groupthink. Those who challenge paradigms or groupthink are commonly ignored, dismissed, or attacked.

As a result of these processes, it can be said that organizations act as communication filters. From the great diversity of information that comes into the organization through many channels, only a tiny portion is treated as relevant or important. Outputs from organizations reflect organizational structures and paradigms. In the case of hierarchical organizations, elites control key outputs, especially the ones treated authoritatively by most others. Those who communicate in defiance of the chain of command, such as whistleblowers, are attacked ruthlessly.

In communication about repression, aggression, and oppression, government bodies are crucial. A repressive government typically makes every effort to present its activities in a favorable light, as in the case of the Indonesian government under Suharto. Other governments can hide or expose repressive actions in other countries. In either case, communication is usually based on the assumption that action, and decisions about action, should be by governments alone. Repression in foreign countries with “friendly” governments is generally ignored, denied, or downplayed, whereas repression in countries that are considered “enemies” are treated as a tremendous scandal. The option of encouraging nonviolent action by citizens is almost always off the government agenda, and communication outputs reflect this assumption.

The challenge for nonviolent activists, in relation to communication, is to figure out what strategies have a chance of transforming or sidestepping organizational filters, espe-

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65 The key figures are the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister. The power of government departments over ministers is a well-known phenomenon that is brilliantly portrayed in the British television series “Yes, Minister.” Public servants in Canberra have told us that watching this series is the best way to understand how the government works.

cially those in government. There are several options.

- Use alternative media to sidestep organizational control. This has the advantage that activists retain control of their messages, but does not directly challenge the organizational filtering process.

- Attempt to influence or use the organizational filtering process, for example by building links with sympathetic insiders and by developing methods for obtaining information and influencing outputs. This undermines organizational control from within but leaves elites intact. Sympathetic insiders are always at risk of exposure, attack, or co-optation.

- Attack the organization's paradigm and power directly through open critique, public campaigns, and pressure on the organization's controllers. This provides the only real prospect of long-lasting change to an existing organization, but is extremely difficult to carry off.

- Set up alternative systems that replicate what the organization does but with structures that promote open communication. In the case of foreign affairs, this would include systems for person-to-person diplomacy, grassroots gathering of "intelligence," and networks to support popular participation and nonviolent action. This strategy is necessarily long-term and would have to be part of a wider process of structural change.

**News values.** We have described how organizations, through their structure and operations, shape the form and content of communication within and through the organization. Concerning communication about repression, organizational shaping by governments is especially important, since they are both responsible for much repression and authoritative commentators on repression that happens elsewhere. Organizational shaping of communication is also important in a range of other bodies, including corporations, churches, trade unions, and other bodies for which repression is not normally a primary concern but which potentially can play a strong role (positive or negative), and social action groups such as Amnesty International that are directly

concerned about repression. There is one other type of organization that is vitally important in this picture: mass media organizations, especially those that report news.

Organizationally, the mass media are quite similar to government departments and corporations: they are large and bureaucratically structured. In fact, mass media are corporations or government bodies themselves, so it is more accurate to say they are quite similar to *other* government departments and corporations. Therefore, it is to be expected that information is controlled by organizational elites with a special brief to serve the elites. However, there is one vital difference: it is part of the mass media's brief to report news, and media organizations compete with each other to supply it. (This does not apply in countries where the government monopolizes the media.) This creates a very different dynamic from that occurring in other government bodies and corporations, where elites seek as a matter of course to control information and restrict outputs, and where public relations — the official output from an organization — is routinely designed to serve organizational interests. The key point is that corporations and government bodies control their own communication outputs: there is no internal competition. They are, in this sense, like authoritarian governments.<sup>66</sup>

News media are no different in regard to their own internal operations — they are as reluctant as any other organization to expose what happens on the inside — but for all other activities have as a mandate the reporting of news. The question is, what counts as news? What everyone sees on television, hears on the radio or reads in the newspaper is so familiar that it seems like a fact of nature: political controversy, wars, natural disasters, accidents, and sporting and celebrity highlights. However, what is selected out as news —

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66 Deena Weinstein, *Bureaucratic Opposition: Challenging Abuses at the Workplace* (New York: Pergamon, 1979), argues generally that bureaucracies are similar to authoritarian states, notably in their treatment of dissidents. We apply this idea here to organizational communication.

especially in the five-minute or half-hour broadcasts that most people use as the basis for their understanding of what is happening around the country and the world — is just a tiny fraction of what is reported and is only one special way of approaching events.

Journalists and editors learn through experience what makes a good story, so much so that they have an intuitive grasp of what will or won't work. In principle, any story, told in any way, could lead the evening news or hit the headlines. In practice, what is selected by editors is tightly constrained by experience, competition, expectations of audiences, and responses of powerful interest groups. The constraints are the result of the complex environment of news-making. One way to talk about them is in terms of "news values," which are the criteria for what makes a good story. They include prominence, proximity, conflict, timeliness, action, human interest, and perceived consequences. For example, the O. J. Simpson saga scored highly on several of these criteria: it involved prominence (Simpson was a well-known sports star and media figure before the murders), human interest (Simpson himself), conflict (a murder), action (Simpson's flight from the scene), and timeliness (the court case was reported as it occurred). In contrast, a small community initiative to arrange visits to people living alone would rate very lowly in terms of news values. There is no prominent person involved, there is no conflict, there is nothing that makes it timely (since the visits are an ongoing process), and there is no "action" (for television purposes). In terms of consequences, the visits might well provide support that prevents illness or even death due to neglect, but such potential benefits are not visible, so the initiative rates low on perceived consequences.

The impacts of the news and the consequences of news values have been analyzed at length by media analysts. The news is both lauded as providing unexcelled insight into what is happening in the world and condemned as selective, biased, overly violent, giving only a superficial understanding, and much else. Out of the vast amount of material

on the media, our interest is in the actual and potential role of mass media in communication against repression, aggression, and oppression. Even with this brief, there are many fruitful directions for investigation. Here we just mention a few key observations.

- Mass media are far more likely to report violence than nonviolence.<sup>67</sup> Violence provides action (especially for television) and is a visible indicator for conflict.<sup>68</sup> Nonviolent action, especially when it involves resolution of conflict, is less newsworthy. The campaign against the MAI, involving no violence, had low media visibility. Reporting on events in Indonesia in 1998 emphasized rioting and gave little attention to opposition to Suharto by artists.

- Mass media sometimes report atrocities, massacres, genocide, and other horrors, but sometimes do not, depending on their relevance to the media's own country, the cost of coverage, the availability of graphic image, the scale of horror, and whether other crises are happening at the same time.<sup>69</sup> Governments

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67 For example, Herbert J. Gans, *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time* (New York: Random House, 1979), p. 35, states of US media's coverage of foreign news about political conflict and protest that "foreign conflicts must be more dramatic and usually more violent than their domestic equivalents in order to break into the news. By and large, peaceful demonstrations are rarely covered, unless they are anti-American."

68 This is most dramatically the case with terrorism, which can be interpreted as communication activated and amplified by violence. See Alex P. Schmid and Janny de Graaf, *Violence as Communication: Insurgent Terrorism and the Western News Media* (London: Sage, 1982).

69 For excellent discussions of news media and war reporting, see Susan L. Carruthers, *The Media at War: Communication and Conflict in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000); Peter Young and Peter Jesser, *The Media and the Military: From the Crimea to Desert Strike* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997). See also Bruce Cumings, *War and Television* (London: Verso,

usually try to cover up their own violence; this was routine practice in the Soviet Union. Media coverage is one of the best ways to overcome government censorship. A range of factors determine media attention and slants. Some mass killing receives little critical media coverage, such as in the Soviet Union in the 1930s and in Indonesia in 1965-1966. Other mass killing receives saturation coverage, such as Kosova in 1998 and East Timor in 1999.

- As described earlier in the discussion of media effects theory, mass media coverage often presents events as a spectacle, namely as something to be watched with no implications for personal action. Nevertheless, action groups can build on awareness of events generated through the media.

- Mass media are part of the culture and subscribe to dominant values, so that some alternative views cannot obtain visibility. For example, terrorism is almost always portrayed as something done by small political or religious radicals or by stigmatized governments and virtually never as state policy by powerful governments.<sup>70</sup> When news is presented in tiny sound-bites, the only sort of message that can be easily gotten across is one that resonates with the listener's pre-existing conceptual framework. To present an alternative perspective requires more time, which is seldom available.

- Although the mass media virtually never express some viewpoints, nevertheless the mass media are relatively open to divergent views, certainly in comparison to organizations such as governments and corporations. Therefore nonviolent activists, human rights groups and many others can obtain coverage

sometimes, though their message will normally be configured within reporting conventions.

In a study that highlights the problems of relying on mass media coverage to stimulate action, Peter Viggo Jakobsen analyzed "CNN effect," namely the idea that media coverage forces western government intervention into conflicts.<sup>71</sup> Jakobsen points out that actually most conflicts are ignored by the media, that pre-violence and post-violence stages receive little attention, that government decisions to intervene are only marginally influenced by media coverage, that governments favor symbolic involvement to give the appearance of action without the substance, and that emphasis is shifted from long-term prevention work to short-term emergency work. Jakobsen focuses on the difficulties of stimulating government action. He notes that nongovernment organizations usually can't get issues on the media agenda unless there is significant killing. Thus for NGOs to push governments to act via media coverage, they must get their message through two stringent filters: the mass media filter based on news values and the government filter based on groupthink.

Our account of the shaping of communication by the organizational form of the news media is built around the idea of news values, themselves an outcome of the structure of media organizations in the context of other powerful organizations.<sup>72</sup> Explaining the organizational shaping of communication in terms of news values has the advantage of being close to the way journalists and editors actually conceive of what they are doing.

Understanding organizational influences on communication is one thing; doing something

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1992); Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Kosovo* (London: Prion, 2000); Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue*.

70 For the view that terrorism by dominant states is by far more important than the type of terrorism reported in the media, see Edward S. Herman, *The Real Terror Network: Terrorism in Fact and Propaganda* (Boston: South End Press, 1982).

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71 Peter Viggo Jakobsen, "Focus on the CNN effect misses the point: the real media impact on conflict management is invisible and indirect," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 37, No. 2, March 2000, pp. 131-143.

72 See W. Lance Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion* (New York: Longman, 1988, 2nd edition) and Rodney Tiffen, *News and Power* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1989), among others.

about them is another. Those who are concerned about repression, aggression, and oppression and want to mobilize action against it have several options.

- Use the mass media by adopting actions and messages so that they make good stories, or in other words rate highly in terms of news values. This is a common approach used by nonviolent activists but it only works for certain types of issues and actions.

- Build links with sympathetic journalists and editors so that normal reactions to what counts as a story are modified. This can be helpful but the influence of individuals is limited in the face of the wider organizational dynamics.

- Educate members of the public to be more informed about how news is constructed and more willing to take action.<sup>73</sup> This is essential but does not by itself challenge the way news is constructed.

- Challenge the driving forces behind the media: government and corporate power, including media power. This is vital for the long term but exceedingly difficult.

- Use alternative media, such as community radio and e-mail, that are more participatory. Alternative media are not a major challenge to the mass media in the short term but are the only long-term solution to problems of media power.

In our discussion of organizational theory, we have focused on two types of organizations that are crucial in communication about repression, aggression, and oppression: governments (especially foreign affairs departments) and mass media (especially the news). The organizational perspective is a powerful one in showing how organizations shape

messages. A basic driving force in government bodies is control of information by elites in order to serve elite interests. Media organizations have as a basic rationale the dissemination of information; the processes by which this occurs are shaped by government and corporations, but with considerable opportunities for insertion of alternative or challenging messages.

We have only touched on shaping of communication by other types of organizations: churches, trade unions, professional associations, charities, sporting clubs, neighborhood groups, and many others. In every case, there is the potential to mobilize or dampen concern and action. Understanding the way the organization shapes communication, and perhaps changing this process, can lead to greater mobilization.

One type of organization is especially important: social action groups. Some of them, such as Amnesty International, seem to be especially good at mobilizing concern among lots of people over a long period through formal organizational structures and rules. Others, such as affinity groups, can motivate high-level nonviolent direct action, such as civil disobedience to blockade arms shipments. How do different structures shape communication? How do they encourage (or sometimes inhibit) action? Which structures are best suited to challenging or circumventing control over communication by governments, corporations, and mass media? These questions deserve considerable investigation.

## Conclusion

In our whistle-stop tour of communication theories, we have found much of value for the task of challenging repression, aggression, and oppression, as well as much that needs to be investigated.

- The transmission model helps draw attention to communication blockages, including censorship and absence of suitable information technology.

- Media effects theory points to the ways that passivity is induced in audiences, espe-

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73 Martin A. Lee and Norman Solomon, *Unreliable Sources: A Guide to Detecting Bias in News Media* (New York: Carol, 1990); Eleanor MacLean, *Between the Lines: How to Detect Bias and Propaganda in the News and Everyday Life* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1981).

cially by presenting news as a sort of spectacle, something that is especially important in dealing with absence of action.

- Semiotics is vital in pointing to the ways in which meanings are constructed; information on its own is meaningless.

- Medium theory highlights the importance that the type of communication technology has on the ability to communicate.

- Political economy shows that the ownership and control of media greatly affect what sorts of messages are carried.

- Organizational theory reveals the potent influence of organizational structure on the form and content of communication, something that is especially important in government bodies and the mass media.

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, we have not set out to develop a comprehensive theory, nor to deal thoroughly with any of the communication theories surveyed here. Rather, our aim has been to pick out insights, wherever they may be found, that may be helpful for opposing repression, aggression, and oppression. Every one of the theories we have discussed has deficiencies, some very substantial, yet even each contains useful insights for our purposes. As one example of how to apply these insights, in chapter 7 we propose a set of steps that nonviolent activists can use in developing a communication strategy.

## Giving voice to nonviolence

In the previous two chapters we looked at perspectives on nonviolent action and on communication in order to extract insights into how to improve communication in nonviolent struggles against repression, aggression, and oppression. It turns out that different communication theories give different sorts of insights relevant to the specific issues involving nonviolent action. How to use these insights depends on the purpose of the investigation. If the purpose is primarily theoretical, namely to understand communication dynamics in relation to nonviolent struggle, then the next step might be to construct a single theoretical model. If the purpose is primarily empirical, then more evidence might be sought in relation to the various insights. If the purpose is primarily social scientific, then a process of iterative theory construction, hypothesis formation, and empirical testing could be pursued. However, here we take a different course.

To pursue a “better” theory is to follow what Nicholas Maxwell calls the “philosophy of knowledge,” which presumes that knowledge has a value in and of itself. Maxwell argues instead for a “philosophy of wisdom” in which scholarly endeavor is oriented to dealing with major social problems such as poverty and war.<sup>1</sup> This book is an attempt to follow the philosophy of wisdom, in that it focuses on problems of repression, aggression, and oppression and examines how to support nonviolent action. Of course, this does not rule out building better theory; however, theory-building is not the goal but only a means. Rather than propose a better theory, in this chapter we outline a practical approach to communication strategy, in the spirit of the

philosophy of wisdom, drawing on the material in previous chapters. After outlining this approach, we illustrate how it can be used to look at the case studies covered in chapters 2 to 4.

### Steps to a communication strategy

Consider a situation in which there is repression, aggression, or oppression that warrants greater attention and action, in which communication is an important factor in inhibiting or facilitating this attention and action. Individuals and groups concerned about this can consider the following steps as a way to help develop a communication strategy, which in turn would be part of a more general nonviolence strategy. Note also that these steps deal only with getting information about a situation to an audience. Another whole dimension to communication strategy — not dealt with here — is communication among members of a resistance or campaign.

**STEP 1** List the major means by which people can, in principle, obtain reliable information about the situation. This includes direct observation, direct reports (for example, telephone, e-mail), alternative media, mass media, and word of mouth. List the major chains through which information flows, such as government statements reported by the mass media.

**STEP 2** For each major chain, list the most significant obstacles or barriers to reliable information and action on the basis of it. In particular, consider:

- communication blockages, including censorship and absence of suitable information technology;
- inducement of passivity in audiences;
- construction of meanings that distort understanding or inhibit effective action;
- control over communication processes;

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1. Nicholas Maxwell, *From Knowledge to Wisdom: A Revolution in the Aims and Methods of Science* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984); Nicholas Maxwell, “What kind of inquiry can best help us create a good world?,” *Science, Technology, and Human Values*, Vol. 17, 1992, pp. 205–227.



- shaping of messages through organizations, especially government bodies and the mass media.

STEP 3 For each major chain, consider methods of overcoming the obstacles or barriers. In particular, consider:

- using different communication media;
- targeting different audiences;
- changing the way messages are constructed;
- working through or challenging organizations that shape messages.

STEP 4 Undertake the approach under step 3 that is most likely to be effective, taking into account one's own resources and social location.

Step 4 makes explicit the point that the choice of a course of action depends on who is taking the action. A religiously-based nonviolent action group has different opportunities to a ginger group of journalists, a dissident within a government bureaucracy, or a network of telecommunications experts. Choosing a course of action also depends on who else is available to take action. In other words, action should be pursued in the context of what other action is occurring or likely to occur.

To illustrate the application of these steps, we use examples drawn from the case studies in chapters 2, 3, and 4. For each example, we select several chains and explore obstacles and methods for overcoming them.

Before beginning, it is important to emphasize that our intent with these examples is to illustrate the steps, not to pass judgement on what people did or didn't do in actual situations. In some cases, people might have tried some of the methods we suggest here; in others, they might have thought of these methods but rejected them for reasons known only to them. It is reasonable to expect that participants often know more about a situation than any outside observer does. On the other hand, as commentators, we have the advantage of hindsight. Activists are not omniscient. They can misjudge situations and make mistakes. This is nothing to be ashamed about.

The key thing is to learn from the past in order to do better in the future.

### **Communication strategy against Indonesian repression in East Timor**

After the Indonesian invasion and occupation of East Timor in 1975, control of communication was a key element in the Indonesian military's operations. In order to mobilize opposition to Indonesian atrocities and support for East Timorese independence, it was crucial to obtain and disseminate reliable information about what was happening. Consider then the four steps.

STEP 1 List the major means by which people can, in principle, obtain reliable information about the situation.

Here are some chains through which information about the situation in East Timor could flow to people in Indonesia, Australia, United States, Portugal, and elsewhere.

- East Timorese directly observe events, subsequently leave East Timor, and talk to people elsewhere.

- Indonesian troops directly observe events, subsequently leave East Timor, and talk to people elsewhere.

- Visitors directly observe events, subsequently leave East Timor, and talk to people elsewhere.

- Indonesian government officials receive reports from East Timor and then make official statements; journalists write stories for Indonesian media based on the statements.

- Government officials from Australia, US, Portugal, and elsewhere receive reports from East Timor and receive Indonesian government statements, and make statements of their own; journalists write stories for the media based on the statements.

- East Timorese directly observe events, subsequently leave East Timor and talk to

overseas spokespeople of the East Timorese resistance, who make statements that are reported in Western media.

- East Timorese directly observe events, then talk to members of the East Timorese independence movement who send information by short-wave radio to receivers in Australia, who then pass the information to sympathizers and journalists.

- Visitors record events on video, smuggle the videotape out of East Timor, and broadcast it on Western television.

We have listed only a selection of possible chains. It should be obvious that there are numerous other possibilities. The aim in step 1 should be to list a wide variety of chains so that diverse options can be considered. Step 1 can be revisited if desired.

STEP 2 For each major chain, list the most significant obstacles or barriers to reliable information and action on the basis of it, focusing on communication blockages, inducement of passivity, construction of meanings, control over communication, and organizational shaping of messages.

For each of the chains listed in step 1, we comment on obstacles.

- East Timorese directly observe events, subsequently leave East Timor, and talk to people elsewhere.

A major obstacle is that only some East Timorese were allowed to leave. Many who did leave were afraid to speak widely due to possible reprisals on relatives in East Timor. Few had sufficient language and public speaking skills to make a big impact on Western audiences. Finally, speaking directly to individuals or groups (without using mass media) has a limited impact.

- Indonesian troops directly observe events, subsequently leave East Timor, and talk to people elsewhere.

Few Indonesian troops would have had an incentive to expose atrocities committed

against the East Timorese, since it would probably mean leaving family and friends and going into permanent exile, with the possibility of reprisals against family members. Limited language and public speaking skills would be additional obstacles.

- Visitors directly observe events, subsequently leave East Timor, and talk to people elsewhere.

The primary obstacle in this case is getting permission to enter East Timor and be in a position to observe atrocities. There might be hesitation in speaking out due to possible reprisals on East Timorese informants. The credibility of reports by visitors could be questioned. Finally, speaking directly to individuals or groups (without using mass media) has a limited impact.

- Indonesian government officials receive reports from East Timor and then make official statements; journalists write stories for Indonesian media based on the statements.

Indonesian government officials almost invariably toed the government line; contrary information was censored or distorted. Officials who contemplated saying something different — telling the truth — knew they could expect to be dismissed or imprisoned. Similar pressures operated on Indonesian journalists, who furthermore were hampered by lack of direct information.

- Government officials from Australia, US, Portugal, and elsewhere receive reports from East Timor and receive Indonesian government statements, and make statements of their own; journalists write stories for the media based on the statements.

The Western government line on East Timor downplayed Indonesian repression. Individual officials who tried to buck the line would have found their input censored or sidelined and possibly their careers put in jeopardy. Hence those journalists who relied on Western government statements would typically report a very watered down account of events.

- East Timorese directly observe events, subsequently leave East Timor, and talk to overseas spokespeople of the East Timorese resistance, who make statements that are reported in Western media.

One obstacle is the perceived credibility of the East Timorese representatives, who are perceived as partisan. Second-hand reports are not as arresting as eye-witness accounts. Another obstacle is that Western media give more attention and credibility to government statements than to statements by East Timorese representatives.

- East Timorese directly observe events, then talk to members of the East Timorese independence movement who send information by short-wave radio to receivers in Australia, who then pass the information to sympathizers and journalists.

The availability and reliability of short-wave systems is a crucial barrier. Australian government intervention to shut down Australian short-wave receivers is another.

- Visitors record events on video, smuggle the videotape out of East Timor, and broadcast it on Western television.

Barriers include getting into East Timor, being able to film significant events, getting the videotape out of the country, and getting the mass media to broadcast it.

Note that in focusing on obstacles, solid steps in chains are not discussed — though they should not be forgotten. For example, eye-witness accounts by East Timorese have the power of authenticity and are far more likely to trigger action in audiences than routine mass media stories. A videotape brought back by a Western journalist has a different power of authenticity: it is harder for Indonesian government apologists to discredit.

STEP 3 For each major chain, consider methods of overcoming the obstacles or barriers. In particular, consider using different communication media, targeting different audiences, changing the way messages are

constructed, and working through or challenging organizations that shape messages.

- East Timorese directly observe events, subsequently leave East Timor, and talk to people elsewhere.

There seems no easy way to get more East Timorese out of the country or to reduce the risk of reprisals on relatives for speaking out. The obstacle of limited language and public speaking skills potentially could be overcome by intensive training.

- Indonesian troops directly observe events, subsequently leave East Timor, and talk to people elsewhere.

More troops might be induced to leave if given moral and financial support. Thinking more generally about communication from troops, thought could be given to setting up a system for dissident troops to share their perceptions with outsiders, for example through anonymous postal or email routes. Setting up such a system would require considerable ingenuity, since it can be assumed that Indonesian officials would do everything possible to track down any military dissidents.

- Visitors directly observe events, subsequently leave East Timor, and talk to people elsewhere.

More information could be obtained about what sorts of people are given permission to enter East Timor, and people recruited who fit the specifications. Perhaps bribery could be used to gain entry, though some activists would surely have reservations about this. Those who are able to gain entry could be trained in techniques of observation and investigation and later in public speaking skills.

- Indonesian government officials receive reports from East Timor and then make official statements; journalists write stories for Indonesian media based on the statements.

The problem here is the imposition of the government line and the acquiescence of most Indonesian media. One way around this would

be for dissident officials to leak information to independent media. Another would be for concerned bureaucrats and journalists to develop a manner of expression — a type of public code — that would reveal what was going on in East Timor to sophisticated readers. Yet another approach would be to push for greater editorial freedom and for journalists to seek out East Timorese, Indonesian troops, or visitors to East Timor for first-hand accounts, thereby overcoming reliance on government statements.

- Government officials from Australia, US, Portugal, and elsewhere receive reports from East Timor and receive Indonesian government statements, and make statements of their own; journalists write stories for the media based on the statements.

Methods of getting around communication obstacles in this chain are similar to those for the Indonesian media: leaks by government insiders to independent media; a type of code, understandable by journalists, in official releases; greater media support for investigative journalism, including seeking out first-hand reports of events in East Timor.

- East Timorese directly observe events, subsequently leave East Timor and talk to overseas spokespeople of the East Timorese resistance, who make statements that are reported in Western media.

To improve the credibility of spokespeople, a study could be made of what factors influence their credibility — appearance, speaking style, content of statements, etc. — and steps taken to improve, assuming they are compatible with the values of the resistance. Methods for spokespeople to dramatize their use of eye-witness accounts could be explored. Pressure could be put on Western media to always provide “balance” by quoting East Timorese spokespeople alongside Indonesian government reports.

- East Timorese directly observe events, then talk to members of the East Timorese independence movement who send information by short-wave radio to receivers in

Australia, who then pass the information to sympathizers and journalists.

Cheap and easy-to-use short-wave units, capable of transmitting great distances, could be smuggled into East Timor. As for the short-wave transmitter in Australia, instead of or as well as going into hiding, activists could make more of a public issue of their efforts for human rights being illegal, thereby highlighting the complicity of the Australian government.

- Visitors record events on video, smuggle the videotape out of East Timor, and broadcast it on Western television.

Development of easy-to-conceal micro-video systems — such as those used by spy agencies — would make recording and smuggling of video recordings much easier. Production and distribution of large numbers of such systems — so that East Timorese as well as visitors could use them — would make it hard for any atrocities to occur without some recording.

In any one of these chains, there is much more that could be said about methods of overcoming barriers to communication. Our comments here are intended to give an idea of the issues that can be traversed.

In practice, many of these possibilities were thought of and discussed by opponents of repression in East Timor. What we suggest here is that more systematic attention be given to communication strategy and that this can be aided by listing possible communication chains, listing obstacles, and then considering methods of overcoming the obstacles.

STEP 4 Undertake the approach under step 3 that is most likely to be effective, taking into account one’s own resources and social location.

Implementing step 4 depends crucially on “one’s own resources and social location,” namely who one is and what one can do. An East Timorese, for example, can contribute to some chains but not others. If emigration is possible, then leaving and subsequently speaking about experiences and observations is an option. Another option is speaking to

visitors. Learning another language, such as Portuguese or English, and improving speaking skills would be helpful for these options. Another possibility is to develop skills in using short-wave equipment. Yet another possibility would be to befriend an alienated Indonesian soldier who might, later, decide to leak information to the media.

Choosing between such options involves assessment of one's situation and personal values. There are no right or wrong answers, but some choices are more likely to be effective than others. It is at this point that access to information and informed analysis becomes especially important.

Imagine that there are activists who are carefully examining communication chains, scrutinizing obstacles, and creatively proposing methods of overcoming them. For this analysis to be really effective, it has to be communicated to everyone who can contribute to making chains effective. If the most promising chains involve East Timorese, then they need to know what they can do to make those chains effective. The same applies to Indonesian soldiers, Indonesian journalists and editors, Australian government officials, and so forth.

Making a communication strategy known to potential supporters raises an additional complexity: it is likely that opponents will find out about the strategy. That is a possibility even when there is tight security, since there is always a risk of infiltrators or surveillance. When a strategy becomes semi-public — which, if a much greater number of supporters are to be involved, it must — then account needs to be taken of countermeasures by opponents. For example, if a strategy involves smuggling of video recorders into East Timor, plus training in their use, then it is likely that the Indonesian military will make greater attempts to screen all incoming goods and to harass anyone suspected of providing video training. This needs to be factored into assessment of this option. The basic point is that communication strategy cannot be developed in isolation from the opponent's responses: strategy has to take account of what the other side is likely to do.

## Communication strategy against Stalinist repression

Far more than the case of East Timor, to talk of communication strategy against Stalinist repression is to speak hypothetically. As noted before, our aim is to illustrate how the steps for developing a strategy can be used, not to pass judgement on what did or did not happen in a particular circumstance.

In the East Timor example, we started with a series of complete chains, beginning with observation or experience of events in East Timor and ending with audiences in other countries. After analyzing these chains — specifically key barriers and ways to overcome these barriers — we noted that, for step 4, the choice of a chain should be made “taking into account one's own resources and social location.”

An alternative way to proceed is to begin the analysis specifying one's resources and social location, selecting chains from the very beginning with these in mind. To illustrate this approach, we pick a challenging case: an illiterate peasant in the Soviet Union in the early 1930s who is witnessing brutality and famine due to forced collectivization.

STEP 1 List the major means by which people can, in principle, obtain reliable information about the situation.

In this case, “people” refers to those who may not know what is happening or how serious it is and who are in a position to take action. Here are some possible chains.

- Tell a Communist Party official about what is happening, asking for the message to be passed on. This might be, for example, (a) a personal story of hardship, (b) what is happening to the village: a collective story of hardship, (c) negative consequences for the country in terms of lower productivity and the like, (d) negative impact of the Party's policies on support for the Party and Communism generally, or (e) tales of heroic resistance to repression.

- Tell a visitor about what is happening, asking for the message to be passed on.

- Travel to the largest accessible town and seek out an influential person; tell the person about what is happening, asking for action to be taken.

- Tell a trusted literate person who is willing to write a letter to Communist Party officials in Moscow.

- Tell a trusted literate person who is willing to write a letter to someone in another country.

STEP 2 For each major chain, list the most significant obstacles or barriers to reliable information and action on the basis of it, focusing on communication blockages, inducement of passivity, construction of meanings, control over communication, and organizational shaping of messages.

- Tell a Communist Party official about what is happening, asking for the message to be passed on.

The biggest problem here is that the official will not pass on the message, due to fear or lack of sympathy. Even worse, the official may organize reprisals. Alternatively, the official may pass on the message and as a result suffer reprisals.

- Tell a visitor about what is happening, asking for the message to be passed on.

Even though there may be some “visitors” — traders, itinerants, relatives, or travelers — their willingness and reliability for passing on a message will probably be unknown. There is always the possibility that trying to pass on a message may lead to informing and reprisals.

- Travel to the largest accessible town and seek out an influential person; tell the person about what is happening, asking for action to be taken.

Who is influential and which influential people can be trusted? It may be difficult to find out. Again, reprisals are possible. Even

traveling to a town and asking about contacting influential people may generate suspicion.

- Tell a trusted literate person who is willing to write a letter to Communist Party officials in Moscow.

There may be no person in the village who is both literate and trustworthy. Furthermore, the literate person would have to be willing to take the risk of writing a letter that could lead to reprisals. Communist Party officials in Moscow may just ignore a letter or see it as a sign of rebellion.

- Tell a trusted literate person who is willing to write a letter to someone in another country.

Again, there may be no person in the village who is both literate, trustworthy, and willing to take the risk of writing a letter that could lead to reprisals. There may be difficulty in deciding to whom to write. The biggest obstacle would be getting the letter out of the country.

STEP 3 For each major chain, consider methods of overcoming the obstacles or barriers. In particular, consider using different communication media, targeting different audiences, changing the way messages are constructed, and working through or challenging organizations that shape messages.

- Tell a Communist Party official about what is happening, asking for the message to be passed on.

To get around the problem that the official may be afraid or unwilling to pass on a message — not to mention organizing reprisals — it would be worth observing officials and talking to trusted friends about them, in order to figure out which ones are most open to an approach. Unfortunately this, in itself, does not protect the officials from reprisals along the chain.

The next thing to consider is what sort of message to provide. As noted in step 1, some possibilities are (a) a personal story of hardship, (b) what is happening to the village: a collective story of hardship, (c) negative

consequences for the country in terms of lower productivity and the like, (d) negative impact of the Party's policies on support for the Party and Communism generally, or (e) tales of heroic resistance to repression. Which sort of story would be most effective may depend on the individual. It might be possible to get an idea by noticing how the official responds to comments about hardship, about the Party, or about resistance. An official who is sympathetic to the people's struggles might respond best to personal or village stories, whereas an official concerned more about the achievements of the Soviet Union might respond best to arguments couched in terms of productivity or support for the Party. Tales of resistance seem unlikely to be the best approach unless the official is actually an opponent of the Party's policies.

Another possibility would be to change the emphasis from stories of hardship and lowered productivity to a more positive angle: the benefits that would accrue if policies were modified in certain ways.

By listening closely to the rhetoric of Party officials, it should be possible to frame comments in language that does not overtly clash with the dominant discourse. This is where a semiotic analysis becomes useful. It may be possible to use the language of the oppressor to convey critical messages.

In order for any of the messages to be as effective as possible, it would be worthwhile collecting information, developing a persuasive story, practicing speaking, and rehearsing the approach to the official. To tell one's own personal story, a selection of episodes and facts needs to be made and then the raw material put together into a touching or telling account. A lesson can be embedded in such a story in a subtle fashion.

To tell a story about a village, information needs to be collected from others, including some personal stories as well as data about illness, deaths, loss of morale, and so forth. This could be a risky process since collecting information may arouse suspicions. On the other hand, collecting information may reveal others who are willing to speak out.

Developing an account about lowered productivity or negative consequences for the Party requires yet a different process of information gathering, including figures on yields, outputs, and attitudes. This is likely to be risky and may depend on co-operation of key individuals.

After gathering information, developing a story, rehearsing it, and picking out a seemingly receptive Party official, care then needs to be taken in selecting the right occasion and moment to talk to the official. If the official seems suspicious, then the discussion can be terminated or side-tracked into safer ground. On the other hand, if the official seems receptive, the full account can be given. Of course, there is always the risk that the official may feign receptiveness in order to gather information for later attack. To avoid this, observation of the official's behavior in previous circumstances may be helpful.

From this single case, it is apparent that a seemingly simple thing — talking to an official — can involve lengthy preparation and careful planning, with many difficult decisions to be made. These same complexities apply to the other chains, but will not be spelled out in such detail.

- Tell a visitor about what is happening, asking for the message to be passed on.

A key issue here is the reliability of the visitor for passing on a message. Information could be sought, discreetly, from anyone who knows about visitors. The approach to the visitor could be planned with the same care that an approach to a Communist Party official might be.

- Travel to the largest accessible town and seek out an influential person; tell the person about what is happening, asking for action to be taken.

To begin, it would be valuable to get in a position where traveling to a town would not arouse suspicion, for example through delivering goods or accompanying an ill person seeing a doctor. Finding out who is influential could be accomplished by general conversation about people in the town. Quite a lot of

such conversation might be needed. The next challenge is talking to the person. Some pretext would be needed: the closer it is to a genuine reason, the better. Then, of course, there is the choice of what story to tell.

- Tell a trusted literate person who is willing to write a letter to Communist Party officials in Moscow.

To find a trusted literate person, the same caution might be needed as finding out about a Party official who could be approached. The person could be tested by getting them to write letters on less sensitive topics and seeing whether they can be relied upon. Ultimately, the person would have to be considered totally trustworthy before broaching the issue of writing a letter to Communist Party officials. Then comes the task of composing the letter and getting it delivered.

- Tell a trusted literate person who is willing to write a letter to someone in another country.

After finding a trusted literate person — as in the previous chain — the biggest obstacle is selecting a person in another country and getting a letter to that person. Any possible routes by which letters could be delivered would need to be explored and assessed. Without knowledge of a moderately reliable method of delivery, this chain has little chance of success.

STEP 4 Undertake the approach under step 3 that is most likely to be effective, taking into account one's own resources and social location.

After examining various options, a choice needs to be made. Given that there are large uncertainties in every chain — especially the receptiveness of the individual to be approached or written to — there is no guaranteed way of making the “best” choice.

This analysis has been from the viewpoint of an illiterate peasant, who is most unlikely to be in a position to analyze chains all the way to their conclusion. For example, whether a visitor can or will use a peasant's story in an

effective fashion is largely unknown. Therefore, to complete the analysis of chains, it would be necessary to start again from the perspective of a different link-person: a Party official, a visitor, or a foreign recipient of a letter. Any one of such individuals could perform an analysis of chains in which they are a link. But for their efforts to be effective, it is a great advantage for there to be peasants who tell their stories in an effective fashion.

### **Communication strategy against the MAI**

As described in chapter 4, the successful campaign against the MAI was a model of effective communication, especially in using the net. Yet it is always possible to do better. As a contrast to the cases of Indonesian and Soviet repression, where we focused on communication chains in situations with relatively little effective resistance, in the case of global corporate domination we look at communication chains early in the anti-MAI campaign. In order to illustrate examination of obstacles and methods to overcome them, we select chains that were less commonly effective than the ones actually used.

STEP 1 List the major means by which people can, in principle, obtain reliable information about the situation.

- Local anti-MAI campaigners provide information about the issue to the families and friends of politicians and government officials; the families and friends then pass concerns on to the politicians and officials. (This is a supplement to the normal approach of providing information directly to politicians and officials.)

- Local anti-MAI campaigners provide information to local media, which then report on the issues.

- Anti-MAI campaigners provide information to international media (such as wire services and CNN), which then report on the issues.



- Campaigners produce anti-MAI television and radio spots and pay stations to broadcast them.

- Anti-MAI campaigners go door-to-door providing information to residents about the issues.

STEP 2 For each major chain, list the most significant obstacles or barriers to reliable information and action on the basis of it, focusing on communication blockages, inducement of passivity, construction of meanings, control over communication, and organizational shaping of messages.

- Local anti-MAI campaigners provide information about the issue to the families and friends of politicians and government officials; the families and friends then pass concerns on to the politicians and officials.

Influence on public officials via their families and friends occurs quite often; when a social movement raises the profile of an issue sufficiently, then all sorts of people become concerned, including families and friends of even the most ardent opponents. To operate through families and friends as a conscious strategy, though, runs the risk of seeming to be intrusive and manipulative.

Another obstacle is getting access to families and friends of key officials. To be most effective, contacts should be already in place rather than contrived.

- Local anti-MAI campaigners provide information to local media, which then report on the issues.

The obstacles here are that local media often are reluctant to take up stories at the instigation of pressure groups, may be more receptive to the government line, may not have resources to undertake their own investigations, and may perceive the MAI as a distant international issue with little relevance to the local audience.

- Anti-MAI campaigners provide information to international media, which then report on the issues.

International media seldom recognize something as “news” when all they have is information provided by nongovernment organizations. They are highly responsive to government agendas and perspectives.

- Campaigners produce anti-MAI television and radio spots and pay stations to broadcast them.

Producing quality spots can be expensive and time-consuming. Costs for prime-time spots are very high. Stations may refuse to broadcast them. Tensions can arise among activists about the use of such tactics, which support the commercial media.

- Anti-MAI campaigners go door-to-door providing information to residents about the issues.

Getting enough knowledgeable volunteers willing to repeatedly approach strangers door-to-door would be a big challenge. In addition, many people who are approached would not see international economic treaties as immediately relevant to themselves.

STEP 3 For each major chain, consider methods of overcoming the obstacles or barriers. In particular, consider using different communication media, targeting different audiences, changing the way messages are constructed, and working through or challenging organizations that shape messages.

- Local anti-MAI campaigners provide information about the issue to the families and friends of politicians and government officials; the families and friends then pass concerns on to the politicians and officials.

One way to overcome the appearance of intrusiveness and manipulation would be to run targeted campaigns — leaflet drops, public meetings, talks at workplaces — in areas where families and friends of officials are known to live or work. Another approach is to make a special effort to recruit activists or supporters from areas where contacts with

families and friends of officials are more likely.

- Local anti-MAI campaigners provide information to local media, which then report on the issues.

To overcome the resistance of local media to an issue that is seen as remote, special efforts could be made to tap into news values for local media. For example, impacts on a local business or individual workers could be dramatized. Potentially sympathetic journalists and editors could be approached and asked what would make the issue relevant to local audiences.

- Anti-MAI campaigners provide information to international media, which then report on the issues.

Contacts within the international media could be cultivated and used to find out the most effective ways of putting globalization issues on the media agenda. The most receptive media organization, outlet, or program could be targeted with the most experienced and well prepared material, tailored exactly for its requirements, and any coverage received might then be used to attract interest from other international media.

- Campaigners produce anti-MAI television and radio spots and pay stations to broadcast them.

Sympathetic media workers can be approached to produce spots on a volunteer basis, at no cost to campaigners. Initially, approaches could be made to purchase cheap broadcast time, for example during the night. If stations refuse to broadcast the spots, this can be made into a campaigning issue, with the spots shown at public meetings and put on the net as examples of what is not allowed to be seen.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Experience with this technique is described by Kalle Lasn, *Culture Jam: The Uncooling of America*<sup>TM</sup> (New York: Eagle Brook, 1999), pp. 194–196. Lasn and friends produced “anti-commercials” and tried to buy TV advertising time, but TV stations refused to run them.

- Anti-MAI campaigners go door-to-door providing information to residents about the issues.

Workshops can be run for volunteers to improve their knowledge and door-to-door canvassing skills. A careful analysis of the images and issues in the MAI and how they might resonate with local people could be undertaken in order to develop the most effective approach for door-to-door canvassing.

STEP 4 Undertake the approach under step 3 that is most likely to be effective, taking into account one’s own resources and social location.

It may be that the methods used by anti-MAI campaigners were in fact the most effective in the circumstances. However, by systematically analyzing a variety of communication chains, including ones such as those above, the possibility of overlooking a fruitful option is reduced.

One risk of net-based activism is that some activists become fixated on the net and become less receptive to using a variety of media and associated options. Analyzing a variety of communication chains is an antidote to excessive reliance on the net — or on any other medium or type of approach, for that matter.

## Conclusion

We began this book with the claim that nonviolent action is a potent and promising option for challenging repression, aggression, and oppression, and that there is much to be learned and done to improve its effectiveness. We presented three case studies demonstrating that nonviolent action can work: the toppling of Suharto in Indonesia in 1998, the thwarting of the 1991 Soviet coup, and the stopping of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment. However, there is a risk in looking primarily at successes of nonviolent action: the lessons of failure or nonaction are less evident. So we also examined parallel cases where nonviolent action was lower profile, less effective, or virtually absent: the 1965–1966 massacres in

Indonesia and the repression in East Timor in the decade after 1975; Stalinist repression in the Soviet Union; and structural adjustment programs.

Ideally, a nonviolent campaign should have succinctly set out goals that are clearly understood and agreed upon by a sufficient number of people who are willing to act. It is also important that the methods of achieving these goals are discussed and agreed upon and that these methods have been chosen both for their compatibility with the goals and for their chances of success.

While there are no guarantees for the success of nonviolent struggle — just as there are no guarantees of the success of armed struggle — we believe that attention to communication has the potential to greatly enhance the chances of success. Communication is vital within groups and for groups to communicate with potential audiences and negotiate with or make demands of opponents. We have focused on how to use communication in order to promote one's cause in an effort to overcome repression, aggression, and oppression. Communication is also important in other areas of nonviolent struggle and needs to be thought about deeply and analyzed for the best means of attaining goals in a self-consistent manner.

Communication strategy should be one component of any nonviolence strategy. The cases of Indonesian repression, Soviet repression, and global corporate domination illustrate the importance of communication both in prominent, active, and successful campaigns as well as in circumstances when resistance is less developed or less successful. Activists have been remarkably resourceful as well as courageous in their use of communication methods. Yet there is always more to learn, which is why a close analysis of previous campaigns and periods of repression is worthwhile.

In order to understand better how to use communication more effectively, in chapters 5 and 6 we surveyed perspectives on both nonviolence and communication. We found that most analyses of nonviolent action give little overt attention to communication.

However, Johan Galtung's idea of "the great chain of nonviolence" provides, with suitable modification, a suitable foundation for analyzing communication to support nonviolent struggle.

There are many perspectives on communication, but few have given any attention to nonviolence. Nevertheless, from nearly every type of communication theory it is possible to draw insights that are relevant to nonviolent action. Building on these insights, we constructed a model of communication against repression, aggression, and oppression in which there are various potential communication chains, each subject to different obstacles.

The combination of case studies and theory can be used for a variety of purposes. One possibility is to undertake a detailed assessment of nonviolent campaigns using a well-developed theoretical framework. For example, using the communication framework we developed in chapter 6, it would be possible to carry out a close analysis of the anti-MAI campaign or other antiglobalization initiatives. This would be a worthwhile endeavor, revealing much about the power and limitations of activist communication practices and strategies, taken in political and organizational context. Such analyses could then be used to modify, refine, and elaborate the theoretical framework, with the aim of developing a nuanced model of communication for nonviolent struggle.

We hope others will undertake such analyses. Our chosen path in this book was somewhat different. Rather than attempt to build up a comprehensive and sophisticated model of communication against repression, aggression, and repression, we chose in this chapter to propose a series of steps that may help activists to examine their communication strategies. These steps by themselves are not a strategy but are intended to encourage activists to think systematically about how they use communication to achieve their goals. The steps themselves are simple enough: list potential communication chains, note the barriers that may make them ineffective, examine ways to overcome the barriers, and then choose those chains that are most likely

to be effective. To make use of these steps more effectively, it is helpful to have knowledge of the role of communication in both successful and unsuccessful actions — such as described in chapters 2 to 4 — and to understand basic ideas about nonviolent action and communication, as covered in chapters 5 and 6.

The steps are themselves readily open to revision or replacement. The key thing is analyzing communication, not the precise method of doing it. The temptation for activists is to rush to do something immediately without carefully assessing options. While the thing done immediately may be worthwhile, the risk is that better options are overlooked in the rush or by making implicit assumptions about what will or won't work or what should or shouldn't be done. The temptation for scholars, on the other hand, is to build impressive models or intricate analyses that are rigorous and satisfying intellectually but have little practical relevance. We have tried to steer a course between these temptations.

There are two principal sources for future development of communication theory for nonviolent action. One is further theoretical work by scholars. There is certainly ample material to work with, both case studies and concepts, whose possibilities are largely untapped. The other source for theory development is nonviolence practice. As activists develop new communication strategies, and especially when they use, reflect on, and modify prior theory and practice, they provide rich new resources for theorizing. Of course, from the point of view of activists, the aim of action is not to contribute to theory development but to effectively confront injustice. For them, theory is a tool rather than a goal. Our preference is to emphasize “theory for activists” over “theory for theorists,” recognizing that these categories are blurred and that each can enrich the other.

Finally, it is always important to remember that, for the purposes of nonviolent action, communication is a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Communication strategy is but one component of the wider task of developing strategy for nonviolent action.

Given the central and increasing importance of communication, though, it is a component that deserves much greater attention.