# an introduction to SOCIAL DEFENCE

Social defence is a nonviolent alternative to military defence. It is based on widespread political, economic and social non-co-operation in order to oppose military aggression or political repression. It uses methods such as boycotts, refusals to obey, strikes, demonstrations, and setting up alternative government.

Social defence is based on the principle that no regime—whether democracy or military dictatorship—can survive without the passive support or nonresistance of a large fraction of the population. Since it relies on resistance by large sections of the population, it is the nonviolent equivalent of guerilla warfare.

Social defence acts as a deterrent by appealing to the civilian population in the aggressor country through its broad base, its nonviolence and the justice of its cause. The methods of social defence maximise political opposition within the aggressor country.

Social defence is not automatically successful, just as military defence is not automatically successful. Its effectiveness can be improved by advance planning and practice. Although it is based entirely on nonviolent methods, violence and suffering caused by the aggressors are still likely. Social defence is not an easy road to peace, but it does offer some hope for creating a world in which social struggle continues but large scale war and violence are greatly reduced.

## THE METHODS OF SOCIAL DEFENCE

The methods of social defence can be divided into three types:

Symbolic actions, such as.
— formal statements (speeches, letters, petitions)
— slogans, leaflets, banners
— demonstrations, protest marches, vigils, pickets
— wearing of symbols of opposition (such as the paper clips worn by Norwegian civilians during the Nazi occupation)
— meetings, teach-ins

Noncooperation, such as:
— social boycott, stay-at-home
— boycotts by consumers, workers, traders, embargoes
— strikes, bans, working-to-rule, reporting "sick"
— refusal to pay tax or debts, withdrawal of bank deposits
— boycotts of government institutions
— disobedience, evasions and delays
— mock incapability ("go slow", "misunderstandings", "mistakes")

Intervention and alternative institutions, such as:
— fasts
— sit-ins, nonviolent obstruction and occupation
— sabotage (such as destruction of information and records)
— establishment of parallel institutions for government, media, transport, welfare, health and education

## WHY IS SOCIAL DEFENCE NEEDED?

The rhetoric of those who advocate spending money on weapons is that military hardware is needed in order to deter potential aggressors or invaders. But is the goal of deterrence best achieved by expenditure on weapons? After a great deal of military expenditure by many governments, the threat of war is as great as ever.

Talk of "winnable" nuclear war and "limited" nuclear wars suggests that the idea of nuclear war is being seriously considered by political and military leaders. Nuclear war seems even more likely if one considers that much of the "defence" capability depends on the "defender" being the first to strike.

Reduction of the threat of invasion

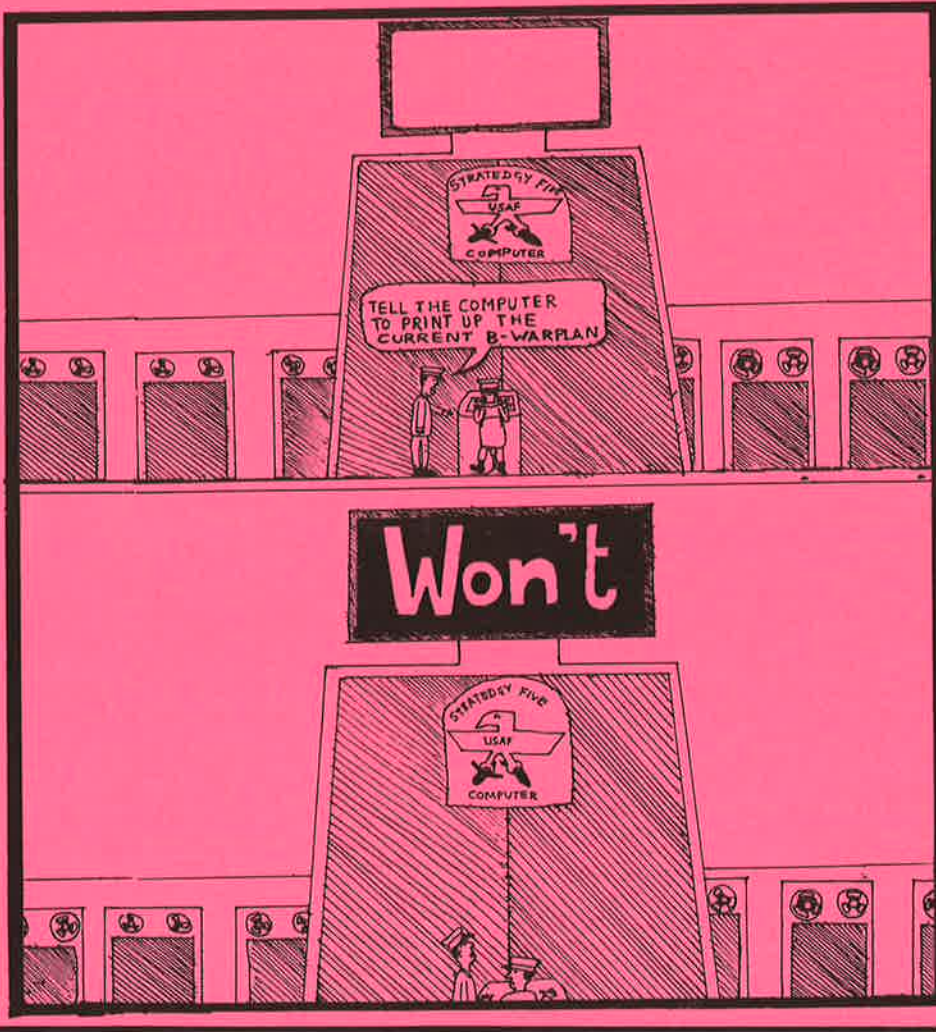Social defence is an alternative to military defence which can reduce the threat of invasion in a number of ways.

Firstly, other governments cannot pretend that their military arsenals are for defensive purposes if the supposed opponent relies on social defence and has no arms. It becomes harder to convince soldiers of the justice of their government's war if they are attacking an unarmed opponent.

Secondly, since with social defence there is no military defence capability, nuclear attack and aerial bombing to overcome such defences becomes a useless exercise and hence much less likely. The notion of pre-emptive attack becomes meaningless.

Thirdly, if social defence is seen by potential aggressors as being well co-ordinated and strong, the estimated cost of an invasion escalates. Because of the broad base of social defence it is extremely difficult to overcome: as long as there are committed people there is resistance.

Historical evidence suggests that social defence could be as effective or more effective than military methods in deterring or resisting attack, if as much money and

energy were devoted to nonviolent means of resistance as are now devoted to violent methods.

### Reduction of suffering

Adoption of social defence as an alternative to military defence can reduce suffering in a number of ways. Firstly, the money now spent of weapons manufacture can be spent on more socially useful projects.

Secondly, by reducing the threat of war the potential suffering is also reduced. In the event of invasion or military takeover, social defence over a wide area precludes the use of many conventional weapons which are unsuited to combatting such defence, including nuclear weapons.

Social defence has a further tendency to reduce suffering since it is difficult to gain support for the use of violence which is defending itself in a totally nonviolent manner. Thus large scale and indiscriminate violence is less likely.

### Guarding the guardians

The existence of military force is normally justified by the threat of "enemies". But one of the greatest dangers to freedom and democracy in many countries today, is the military themselves. If military forces take over the government, who will stop them? Who guards the guardians?

With social defence this problem does not arise, since social defence is based on widespread popular participation and so eliminates the dependence on a professional defence force.

## WHY IS SOCIAL DEFENCE NEEDED IN BRITAIN?

Social defence is not limited to resistance to a full-scale invasion. It can be used to preserve threatened civil rights. Although military invasion or takeover are unlikely, there are many other things that could occur:

**A political coup** which the military does not oppose, but in which elections of parliament are suspended indefinitely. Social defence could be used to support demands for a return to democratic principles.

**Acts of violence** (such as the Brighton bombing) which provide an excuse for police or military powers to be expanded. Social defence could be used to preserve rights such as no arrest without trial, the right to march and congregate in public places, and freedom of speech.

**Declaration of a state of emergency** following an attack on a military installation. This could be used as a pretext for suspending civil rights and jailing "dissidents". Social defence could be used to challenge government or military control.

Because social defence is largely dependent on a closely knit network of alliances throughout the community, it is important for people to strengthen these ties. They already exist in the form of trade unions, clubs, playgroups. They include informal friendships and links between neighbours, workmates and students. All these relationships are crucial to the success of any social defence operation. In any community action, it is important for people to act together, knowing that thousands of others are doing the same.

## LOCAL COMMUNITIES

People can work out plans for resistance with their neighbours. There are many possible methods—street signs can be turned around or removed, as was done in Czechoslovakia to resist the Soviet invasion

of 1968, for instance. Local people will still know their way around, but invaders will be hindered.

Conversations can be struck up between local residents and soldiers in order to establish friendships. Grafitti can be used to promote messages of nonviolence and solidarity in the resistance. People can learn the use of local equipment such as typewriters, printing facilities or citizen's band radio.



## FACTORY WORKERS

Factory workers can deny the end product of their labour to an aggressor by knowing how to control their production process and, if necessary, to stop it. The exact course of action to be taken will depend on the circumstances. If, for example a general strike is held, workers should know how to disable their factory so no one else can use it. In a long drawn out struggle, workers producing goods for the general population (clothes, housing, etc) may decide to continue operations. Others in areas vital to an aggressor or repressive ruler (armaments, fuel etc) probably should disrupt their factories as much as possible.

Johan Galtung suggests that for the strongest resistance, factories should be designed around a small number of simple but vital componenets, which if removed and destroyed, cannot be quickly replaced. Copies can be held in a safe place, perhaps even in a foreign country. No aggressor could get the factory to operate, and the use of force or even torture would not be of any help, and so probably would not be used.

Factory workers can: (a) learn how to disable or halt production with the minimum damage; (b) learn how to quickly alter production methods to make products more useful to the community; (c) develop procedures for communication and decision-making among workers and between workers and other groups; (d) carry out workshops and "trial runs" in disrupting or changing factory production to resist aggression; and (e) share experiences with other workers and the public.

## COMPUTER OPERATORS AND PROGRAMMERS

Computers are vital to many activities in modern industrial society, including communications, industrial processes, military planning and the operation of bureaucracies. As a result, computer workers are in a strong position to help oppose any group which wished to take over society for its own purposes, by interfering with or changing the operation of computers. They are in an especially strong position since outsiders cannot easily take over computing jobs. Not even the use of force can guarantee that "bugs" are removed from computer systems or that computer output is exactly what was desired.

To prepare for effective resistance, computer workers can: (a) learn how to terminate or disrupt the operation of computers, preferably without being detected if necessary; (b) prepare alternative programmes, or subtle alterations to existing programmes, which could be used in' an emergency; (c) liase in these efforts with other sympathetic programmers and operators; (d) carry out "trial runs" in which the operations of computers are disrupted or altered to resist aggressors; and (e) communicate information about resistance by computer workers to others in the computer field and in the general public.

## OTHER EXAMPLES

Detailed responses to aggression for nearly every group in society could be developed. For instance:

**Government employees** can destroy or "misplace" files on "dissidents" and others who might be targets for security forces;

**Communications workers, secretaries and others** can "accidentally" pass vital information to opposition groups;

**Sympathetic members** of the armed forces can warn resistance members about impending attacks and other operations, can sow seeds of doubt within the military, and can "misunderstand" or quietly neglect to carry out orders;

**People** can "go slow" or "misunderstand" in carrying out any task forced upon them by aggressors. This is a good method against really brutal rulers, since it is very hard to tell whether inefficiency is genuine or not.

## WHAT ABOUT SEVERE REPRESSION?

Social defence may sound promising when used against aggressors who must pay attention to "public opinion", as in most Western democracies. But can it work against really ruthless attackers, or against repressive regimes such as the dictatorships of Hitler and Stalin?

Historical examples suggest that the answer is yes.

Effective nonviolent resistance to the Nazi occupiers occurred in the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway during World War II. For example, the Nazi regime in Norway run by Quisling tried to force the schools to teach Nazi doctrines. The teachers publicly refused and many were arrested and sent to concentration camps. But they continued to resist, and finally the Quisling government—worried about angering the Norwegian people too much—released the teachers. The schools were never used for Nazi propaganda.

Even in Nazi Germany itself, nonviolent resistance was effective in some cases. In 1943 in Berlin, thousands of non-Jewish wives of Jews arrested by the Gestapo demonstrated outside the detention centre. Eventually the prisoners were released. Nonviolent resistance has also been used with some success in the Soviet Union, for example in prison labour camps at Vorkuta in 1953.

Even the most ruthless dictatorship depends for its existence on passive support or non-resistance by a large fraction of the population. No government in history has been so powerful that it could function without a fair degree of consent or aquiescence. If the regime adopts unpopular policies and tries to repress all opposition violently, this will cause ever larger numbers of people to oppose and resist the government.

Social defence *can* be successful against severe repression. But the methods and tactics used need to be specially chosen if repression is harsh. More use can be made of quiet "mistakes" in carrying out tasks and "misunderstandings" of orders. And when support for resistance is widespread, open defiance becomes possible.

## IF SOCIAL DEFENCE IS SO EFFECTIVE, WHY HASN'T IT BEEN TRIED BEFORE?

Social defence is at variance with our present political and economic system. It advocates shared control as a replacement for the military defence hierarchies which keep power and knowledge in the hands of the minority. The continuance of the military system is in the interests of a powerful few, including weapons manuf-

acturers, top government bureaucrats and other vested interests.

A second reason is that the idea of social defence is relatively new. It is true that the methods of social defence, such as strikes, boycotts, demonstrations and "go-slow" campaigns have been used for many centuries. Furthermore, organised campaigns of nonviolent action have been developed, for example under Gandhi's leadership during India's struggle for independence and as part of the Black Civil Rights movement in the USA in the 1950s and 1960s under Martin Luther King. But it is only in the last 25 years or so that social defence has been proposed as a full-scale alternative to military defence.

## THE KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL SOCIAL DEFENCE

Social defence is more than a collection of nonviolent techniques of resistance. It must be based around defending basic principles and around a sound strategy.

The principles to be defended are those which are understood by people to be basic to their way of life.

The key to a successful nonviolent strategy is maintaining the unity and morale of the resistance. Decisions about demonstrations, strikes and other actions should be made with carfeful consideration of their effects on unity and morale.

Success also depends on persistence. Nonviolent resistance is not guaranteed to succeed quickly, any more than violent resistance is. In a long struggle, tenacity is vital.

Finally, preparation to use nonviolent methods is important. Most historical uses of nonviolent resistance have been spontaneous. With thorough preparation, the chance of success is increased. People can learn about that to do and train in the use on methods and strategy of nonviolent action.

# Social defence and social change

Let us imagine that an armed invasion of the country has taken place. From the moment that the troops land and the new government assumes power, they are met with a combination of total non-cooperation and active disobedience by the population. In a matter of weeks there is a total general strike, and there has been a complete breakdown in the organisation and discipline of the invading forces. Desertion is rife. It is impossible to count on the loyalty of the troops, and the military are unable to govern. Everywhere posters, airborne leaflet drops and underground radio proclaim the imminent collapse of the invasion. Faced with continued resistance and an army that is rapidly falling apart, the new government admits defeat and secretly leaves the country, the troops begin to pull out, the invasion has failed.

This is just one interpretation of how a campaign of nonviolent social defence could succeed against an aggressor. How must we piece such resistance together? Initially, statements of total non-cooperation with the new regime could be issued, warning that if the invaders remained they would be faced with nonviolent social resistance on a massive scale. Individual acts of sabotage, absenteeism, tampering with factory machines and other acts could then be started, while the population learned the nature and tactics of the invading forces. Underground papers, pirate radio and grafitti could then begin to spread and share information to counter government propaganda. It is certain that the invading government would take over the television and radio networks. A mass total boycott of television could then be organised. Community groups could arrange the mass "dumping" of TV sets, and bonfires of government-issued newspapers. As resistance grew it would need some level of coordination and "pulling together" to have maximum effect. Some form of network would obviously be needed—to help share out tools, resources and ideas. From this could grow transport strikes, go slows, and when the time was right, a total general strike and concerted resistance actions.

## PART OF AN ARMED STRUGGLE

Actions & techniques listed here are often used *as part of an armed struggle*. In armed resistance campaigns at present going on in the world there is always an element of nonviolent resistance techniques (be they "alternative councils", literacy schemes or whatever). But if there is some overlapping of tactics between the two approaches, the *strategy* offered by social resistance is very different. Social defence is not armed resistance minus the weapons, it is an attempt to present a realistic defence approach that is open to the whole population, that does not rely on elites or wasteful arms spending, and that minimises bloodshed and the risk of bloodshed.

## THE ONLY ACCEPTABLE FORM

There are many, many questions to be answered and strategies to be worked out, but for nonviolence activists, it is the only acceptable form of defence, and we must begin to publicise and discuss it. The questions are largely tactical ones, rather than moral or political ones: How do we organise an underground network? What is acceptable sabotage? How do we respond to the internment of political activists, and violence directed against us? Do we ignore or attempt to win over individual members of the invading troops? and so on. (Answers to these sorts of questions will only come through debate and discussion within the peace movement, grassroots community groups and in the "wider" political world.) We must remember that ideas of social defence are not idealistic or untested. In Poland, Solidarnosc have organised underground newspapers and networks of activists, and a whole range of non-violent mass resistance. There are many other historical examples, and in the current miners strike (November 1984) whole communities are showing their ability to organise food distribution, sharing of resources and semisecret organising of their campaign, in the face of massive intimidation. As people are imprisoned, others are stepping forward to take their place. The experiences of all peace, liberation and social justice movements, combined with community groups and the actions of communities themselves all provide a basis for effective social defence.

We need to publicise and discuss social defence in day schools, discussion groups, raise the ideas in trade unions and in places of work, and learn from the experiences of our own nonviolent direct actions. But what is to be the focus of our campaigning? Do we attempt to build a programme that will influence governments into at least considering ideas of social defence? Or is it more important that we simply try to shift the terms of the "defence" debate to include ideas of nonviolent social defence?

## PLANNING FOR REVOLT

Moves toward social defence would, because of its very nature, weaken the power of the government and would increase the individual and collective power of the population. The possiblity of a revolt against our own government would be more likely to succeed. It's hard to imagine that a government would willingly introduce proposals that would weaken its own power. Yet we should not discount the importance of campaigning in mainstream political areas. Some people will want to put energy into party political activity. Though they may find it slow going, there may well be valuable spin-offs from this into other areas, such as widening the scope of defence debates and increasing public awareness of the issues involved. For too long alternative defence debates have been limited to discussions of smaller bombs and less deadly warheads, for pacifists and anti-militarists generally we need to be able to see beyond that.

## PLANNING FOR SOCIAL REVOLUTION

Training and planning for social defence is also planning for social revolution. It is difficult to imagine nonviolent social defence being taken up by our present system, but the techniques we learn for social defence are also techniques for social revolt. Twenty years ago the idea of a military coup in Great Britain would have seemed far-fetched, in 1984 the possibilty seems a lot more real. Amercian imperialism will not leave our shores easily, just as Soviet imperialism will not leave Poland easily. Perhaps, for us, it is no longer a question of what do we do if the Russians come, but what do we do if the Americans stay?

At present, we are using many of the philosophies and tactics of social defence in our peace activity. An awareness of that must strengthen and enlarge the possibilities for social defence.

## FURTHER READING

Defence in the Nuclear Age Stephen King-Hall (Victor Gollanz; London 1958)*
The Strategy of Civilian Defence: nonviolent resistance to aggression ed Adam Roberts (Faber & Faber; London 1967)*
The Politics of Nonviolent Action Gene Sharp (Porter Sargeant; Boston 1973—available through Housmans bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London N5)
War Without Weapons Andree Boserup & Andrew Mack (Frances Pinter; London 1974)*
Solidarity Underground Accounts of resistance in Poland (Polish Solidarity Campaign; London 1983)
Alternatives Nonviolentes Journal (in French) with frequent contributions on NV and social defence, from: Craintilleux, 42210 Montrond, France.
*Out of print: order through a library, or Housmans bookshop may have a few.