

- 11 & 21 especially.
 6. Richard Gregg, *The Power of Nonviolence* (New York: Shoken, 1966, first published in 1935), pp 16, 62.
 7. Ibid, pp. 94-100.
 8. Walter Lippmann, "The Political Equivalence of War", *Atlantic Monthly*, August 1928, p. 181. James's original essay is summarized along with Lippmann's extension of it.
 9. & 10. Ibid.
 11. See for example, Aldous Huxley's *Ends and Means* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1937).
 12. Barthelmy de Ligt, *Conquest of Violence* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co. 1938), p. 162.
 13. Ibid, p. 104.
 14. Etienne de la Boetie, *The Discourse of Voluntary Servitude*, trans. Harry Kurz (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1975). pp. 50-52.
 15. The most recent exposition of this view of power can be found in Sharp's *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, 3 vols. (Boston: Porter Sargent Publishers, Extending Horizons Books, 1973), vol. 1. pp. 7-48, hereafter cited as Sharp, *Politics*.
 16. A form of mass social action based on an absolute commitment to the values of truth, nonviolence or *ahimsa*, and self suffering. Krishnalal Shridharani, *War Without Violence* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1939), p. 4.
 17. Ibid, p XXV.
 18. M.K. Gandhi, "Can India be Defended?" *Liberty*, 17 August 1949.
 19. Ibid.
 20. Kenneth Boulding, "Paths of Glory", Friends Book Centre, London, 1937, p. 29.
 21. Dr. Jessie Wallace Hughan, "Pacifism and Invasion", War Resisters' League, 1939.

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The Pitfalls of Nonviolent Revolution

Nonviolent Revolution in India. Geoffrey Ostergaard. - New Delhi: Gandhi Peace Foundation, 1985.



In Western countries such as Australia, the idea of nonviolent revolution is not a common one. Revolution is traditionally associated with the left, and brings to mind images of barricades and guerrilla struggles. Indeed support for violent liberation struggles is widespread on the left. On the other hand, few nonviolent activists have revolutionary aims. They may want to stop certain forestry operations or get rid of US military bases, but even if these things were achieved it would be far from a transformation of the basic social relations of the state, capitalism, patriarchy, bureaucracy and the domination of nature.

So far there is little organised or conscious base in Australia for the 'project' of nonviolent revolution, although it is possible to interpret some present-day social struggles as part of such a project. Those who would like to move in this direction can benefit by studying experiences in other countries. A good place to start is with Geoffrey Ostergaard's book *Nonviolent Revolution In India*.¹

The nonviolent action campaigns led by Gandhi from the 1920's on, leading to the independence from British rule in 1947, are well known and documented. Ostergaard takes up the story after Gandhi's death in 1948. The mantle of leadership of the movement fell to Vinoba Bhave. Gandhi had always seen the struggle

against the British, using nonviolent action for coercive purposes — so called "negative satyagraha" — as only one part of a wider revolutionary program. The other side emphasised by Gandhi was the positive program — "positive satyagraha" — for example involving individual purification, economic self-reliance and voluntary participation in communal enterprises.

The Indian Government adopted a facade of Gandhism while it promoted Western-style industrialisation. By contrast, Vinoba led the *sarvodaya* movement (the movement for nonviolent revolution, "for the welfare of all") along the path of the positive program, concentrating on the spiritual dimension of social change at the grassroots. Two major programs were initiated: first was *bhoodan* or land-gift, which involved persuading large landowners to donate land for the landless, and later there was *gramdan* or the "gift of village", involving members of a village giving up individual property rights to the village community. Thousands of workers were involved in the 1950s and 1960s in promoting these programs, and initially there were considerable successes. But appearance was better than reality. Many of the land gifts were of poor land, and the number of true *gramdan* villages failed to grow fast enough to make much impact.

This was the story up to about 1970, a story which has been told in an earlier book.² *Nonviolent Revolution in India* gives great detail on the dynamics of the grassroots Gandhian movement in the 1970's and early 1980's.

Besides Vinoba, the other key person in the drama was Jayaprakash Narayan, known as JP, a former Congress Socialist Party activist in the 1930's who had renounced party politics and became a Gandhian, arguing that the people should not be depending on the state.

By 1970, the *sarvodaya* movement and its organisational embodiment, the Sarva Seva Sangh, had reached a crossroads. In the next few years, its strategy changed from a primary emphasis on the positive program of *bhoodan* and *gramdan* to more emphasis on negative *satyagraha* and more linkage with other opposition social groups such as students and youth. The movement, which previously had strictly avoided any connection with electoral politics, moved to participate in elections, but in a "non-partisan" way.

Ever since 1947, the Congress Party had governed India with little chance of any other party being elected. In the early 1970's Indira Gandhi was Prime Minister; the opposition parties were disorganised and splintered. The only person with the reputation to unify the opposition and mount a challenge was JP, and he had formally opted out of electoral politics.

In the state of Bihar, the ruling Congress government was challenged by massive student protest. Bihar was also the state where the strength of the *sarvodaya* movement was the greatest. JP and others in the movement moved to oppose the Bihar government. This process essentially caused a split in the movement: most *sarvodaya* workers favoured JP's direction, but a minority around Vinoba refused to go along.

Ostergaard provides in his book a detailed account of the struggles in and out of the movement throughout India's turbulent 1970's. The challenge to the Congress Party in Bihar triggered a more widespread opposition to the Congress Party,

and this process began spreading across the country. This threat led Indira Gandhi to declare a state of emergency in 1975, thereby suppressing civil liberties generally as well as squashing the *sarvodaya* movement. With the lifting of the emergency in 1977, opposition parties united to form the Janata Party which won national office. But Janata's short term in office was disastrous and provided little support for the *sarvodaya* movement. Indira Gandhi was back as Prime Minister by 1979 as the opposition parties fragmented.

The events were much more complex than I have outlined here. Ostergaard's account is especially valuable in documenting the disputes over the movement's direction, involving Vinoba, JP and the Sarva Seva Sangh. It provides an inside look at strategy formation in a period when nonviolent revolution seemed a real possibility.

Deriving a simple message from these experiences for Australian activists is not easy because of differences in political and social structures. For example, the guru status of Vinoba and JP has no parallel in Australia. What is important, I believe, is the raising of some vital issues which have received little attention. Here I mention three areas worthy of more analysis and discussion.

First, what should be the role of "positive" and "negative" uses of nonviolent action? In most Western countries, nonviolent action is mostly the "negative" mode, involving rallies, sit-ins, boycotts or obstruction in an attempt to apply pressure to opponents. Actions which could be categorised as 'positive' nonviolent action certainly occur, but this is not the focus of organised training and action. There is no intrinsic superiority to either approach. It seems to me that there should be more discussion of the issues involved.

Second, the Emergency in India points to the danger that successful nonviolent action could lead to government repression. This could be a consideration, for example, if campaigns against US military bases in Australia began mobilising large segments of the population. It may

seem that the danger is small, but things can happen suddenly as in India in 1974 and 1975 and in Fiji in 1987. Currently there is no consideration for how to prevent or thwart severe government repression. In India, the Emergency was triggered partly because JP made a premature direct challenge to the State (to the extent, for example, of appealing to the police and armed forces to refuse to obey immoral orders). Much needs to be done to learn about how to avoid coups and repression in the struggle for nonviolent revolution.

Third, what should be the role of party politics? One of the reasons for the Emergency in India was that the *sarvodaya* movement, and JP's prestige, was being linked to a formal political challenge to the ruling Congress Party. The movement might have been more successful had it avoided the link to electoral politics. In Australia, activists seem to be more ready to participate in party politics; there is little principled refusal to do so, and little activity at the grassroots that sees revolution without a party as an important vehicle. Ostergaard points out that electoral politics provides valuable legitimisation for the state: "*To set up a 'party', as distinct from generating a 'movement', is to acquiesce in the division of labour between an elite and the masses, the division that has to be overcome.*" (p. 366). This message is a useful one in Australia at a time when setting up yet another party is the fashion.

Both Vinoba and JP are now dead. Their dreams of nonviolent revolution were not realised, and the road towards it has been bumpier than they might have imagined. Digesting experiences of difficulty and setbacks as well as of success is important in helping the long-term project of nonviolent revolution.

Brian Martin

Footnotes:

1. Geoffrey Ostergaard, *Nonviolent Revolution in India* (New Delhi: Gandhi Peace Foundation, 1985).

2. Geoffrey Ostergaard and Melville Currell, *The Gentle Anarchists: A Study of the Leaders of the Sarvodaya Movement for Nonviolent Revolution in India* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).