

EDITORIAL

Resisting State Violence

Brian Martin

Resisting state repression is of central importance in the quest for a better world. A great deal of the unnecessary suffering and death in the world is due to the actions of military and police forces, both through wars and through action against a country's own population. This occurs especially in military and other dictatorships, but also in constitutional democracies. It should not require very many examples of intimidation, imprisonment, torture and killing to emphasise the importance of this topic.

The direct effects of state repression are clear. Also crucially important are the indirect effects: the inhibition of democratic impulses and the stifling of attempts to create a more just and peaceful world. Just the threat of surveillance, dismissal from jobs, harassment and beatings is often enough to thwart grassroots initiatives.

There is considerable documentation of the effects and causes of state repression, though less than one might expect considering the significance of the topic. More disappointing is the lack of theoretical analysis of how to oppose state repression and assessments of practical efforts to do so.

In 1990 I had the opportunity to meet Steve Wright, one of the world's leading authorities on the technology of repression. (A good example of his work is included in this issue.) I asked him what had been done on how to use nonviolent action to oppose the technology of repression. Wright hadn't come across much on this topic. He did, though, give me a list of some of the world's leading researchers on state repression and refer me to some publications.

Shortly afterwards, I wrote to several of these researchers, including Richard Falk, Ted Gurr, Edward Herman, Michael Klare and Michael Stohl.¹ They were kind enough to suggest references and send copies of their papers on the topic of state repression, including some insightful analyses of the origin and dynamics of the phenomenon. But there was relatively little that they could offer to suggest how to resist state repression.

Of course, their own works are a vital part of this resistance. Documenting the problem alerts others to its significance and provides guidance for those who take direct action. To repeat, considering the

significance of this issue, it is surprising how few scholars have tackled it.

But documenting the problem is only one strategy. What insights were there in all this writing for activist groups or mass movements confronting a repressive state? The answer: very little. The most useful suggestions came from Robert Irwin (see later).

The first paper in this issue of *Philosophy and Social Action*, by Keni Mbingu (a pseudonym), outlines the problem of state repression in Kenya and the closely linked repression of indigenous Kenyan culture. Although the author does not present a programme to oppose state repression, his analysis highlights some of the main threats to the repressive state, such as critical intellectuals.

Jörgen Johansen tells about a playful yet remarkably effective campaign against imprisonment of total resisters to national service in Norway. Since a continual focus on the dreadful impacts of state repression can be debilitating, the sort of positive approach delightfully described in this article deserves much more emphasis.

Steve Wright tackles the grim issue of the technology of repression. His article documents the technologies and methods used, the massive trade in this area and the complicity of numerous governments. One obvious implication of his analysis is that governments — including liberal democracies — are unlikely candidates to stop repression: after all, they are either engaging in it or fostering it elsewhere through their policies, or both.

Wright's article concludes with a careful consideration of approaches for non-government organisations to help halt the repression business. He considers legal, research and campaigning approaches. Each of these deserves much more attention and effort.

Many of the efforts against state repression — by peace groups, Amnesty International, Campaign Against the Arms Trade and numerous others — rely entirely on nonviolent methods. On the other hand, many liberation movements have sought to oppose state repression by including armed struggle in their repertoire of methods. The question arises, can nonviolent methods alone be successful? Alternatively, does the use of violence create the seeds of future repression by the armed liberators? Maduabuchi Dukor in his article takes the view that, in a country such as Nigeria, nonviolent methods are often ineffective whereas riots have actually changed government policies. This is a contentious issue which needs to be regularly addressed both by proponents of nonviolence and by those who accept some use of violence against state repression.

Whether the opposition to state repression is violent or nonviolent, there is no doubt that the resisters will commonly be confronted by violence on the part of the state. That is, of course, the essence of state repression. One of the most challenging questions is

what to do if a government undertakes massive killing in order to subdue its opponents.

Gene Keyes emphasises the importance of this question in his paper on heavy casualties and nonviolent defence. He shows, through citation of classic works in the field, that leading writers on nonviolent defence have avoided or downplayed the issue of heavy casualties. His analysis is not an attack on nonviolent defence. After all, the issue of heavy casualties should be even more acute for advocates of guerrilla warfare, though it is discussed just as rarely. Rather, Keyes plays the role of the sympathetic critic who raises the most difficult issues. For readers who are not familiar with the concept of nonviolent defence, I have provided a short introduction to his article.

In addition to material on resisting state repression, in this issue there is an article by Valentine Bazhanov on corruption in the higher levels of Soviet science. Bazhanov describes how some people are able to obtain high degrees not on the basis of their work but on the basis of connections. He calls this phenomenon 'shadow science'. This sort of corruption is known also in other countries, but has received remarkably little public attention.

I will conclude this introduction by mentioning some other initiatives against state repression. Probably best known of all organisations campaigning against repression is Amnesty International. It is most well known for its letter-writing campaigns to governments in support of prisoners of conscience. But at least as important are Amnesty's research efforts and documentation of abuses of human rights throughout the world. This work has great impact because of its high degree of accuracy, its non-partisan commitment to exposing repression due to governments of all political complexions, and its strong network of local groups. Amnesty's brief is limited to only certain types of action, but its impact extends much further, since activists inside and outside Amnesty often rely on Amnesty's reports for information and are stimulated by its exposure of human rights abuses.

A more direct form of intervention is taken by Peace Brigades International. PBI trains teams of nonviolent intervenors, who travel to places of intense conflict such as Guatemala and Sri Lanka. There, they may attempt to apply conflict resolution techniques, accompany people threatened by violence, or simply seek to inhibit violence by their calm presence.²

In addition to the approaches of Amnesty and PBI, there is great scope for people in one country, to oppose repression in another country. Methods that can be used for this purpose include publicising the issue, organising consumer boycotts, promoting trade union boycotts of shipments of goods, communicating with resisters in

other countries (through the post, short-wave radio or personal contact), providing haven for refugees and refusing to be a tourist. Organised actions of this sort have been taken in the case of some countries, such as South Africa. Currently there are attempts to set up networks to foster more systematically this sort of action in other parts of the world.³

Since Western governments frequently support repressive regimes in other parts of the world, these same Western governments commonly use surveillance and harassment against home-grown activists, including those who oppose repression in client regimes. A very useful manual for opposing such surveillance and harassment is Brian Glick's book *War at Home*.⁴ It documents covert action by the US government against activists in the US and, more importantly, offers commonsense guidelines for response.

I mentioned earlier that, in response to my queries about how to oppose the technology of repression, the most useful suggestions were from Robert Irwin. Irwin is the author of *Building a Peace System*⁵ and other writings, and an experienced practitioner and analyst of nonviolent action. He began by emphasising the need to categorise the problem. For example, there is the problem of stopping summary executions, the problem of encouraging noncooperation among those who maintain or retrieve records on "subversives", and the problem of stopping exports of repressive technologies. Another set of categories involves technologies: for destruction, torture, surveillance, propaganda, etc. A convenient set of categories is a solid beginning for examining solutions.

Irwin also suggested a range of references and ideas, for example on liberatory or convivial technology and on methods of nonviolent action that involve the use of technology. Finally, he suggested that the weakest link in the technology of repression can sometimes be the people who use it. In such cases, winning them over is a crucial task.

In my opinion, one of the most encouraging initiatives in recent years is the founding of PIOOM in the Netherlands. PIOOM stands for Project Interdisciplinair Onderzoek naar Oorzaken van Mensenrechtenschendingen. In English, this means Interdisciplinary Research Project on Root Causes of Human Rights Violations. PIOOM was set up in 1988 at the Center for the Study of Social Conflicts, University of Leiden, The Netherlands,⁶ to undertake and promote research and analysis into gross human rights violations. One of the key figures in this operation is Alex P. Schmid, who has carried out penetrating research into the possibilities and limitations of nonviolent struggle.

The work at PIOOM is exciting because it goes beyond the usual documentation of the problems and also because it avoids the unrealistic optimism found in many activist circles. There are enough

possible research projects in this area to keep a large research team occupied for years.⁷

But, of course, research on state repression is not an end in itself. Analyses such as those carried out at PIOOM need to be linked to a programme of action. That is something that everyone should be able to be involved in:

This issue of *Philosophy and Social Action* is a small contribution towards the big issue of resisting state violence. It will serve its purpose well if it encourages further research, writing and social action against state repression.

NOTES

- 1 Some representative publications: Richard Falk, *Revolutionaries and Functionaries: The Dual Face of Terrorism* (New York: Dutton, 1988); Ted Robert Gurr, "War, revolution, and the growth of the coercive state", *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 1, April 1988, pp. 45-65; Edward S. Herman, *The Real Terror Network: Terrorism in Fact and Propaganda* (Boston: South End Press, 1982); Michael T. Klare and Peter Kornbluh (eds.), *Low-intensity Warfare: Counterinsurgency, Proinsurgency, and Antiterrorism in the Eighties* (New York: Pantheon, 1988); Michael Stohl and George A. Lopez (eds.), *The State as Terrorist: The Dynamics of Governmental Violence and Repression* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1984).
- 2 Peace Brigades International, International Office, Woolman Hill, Keets Road, Deerfield MA 01342, USA.
- 3 For more information, contact Schweik Action Wollongong, PO Box 492, Wollongong East NSW 2520, Australia.
- 4 Brian Glick, *War at Home: Covert Action against U.S. Activists and What We Can Do about It* (Boston: South End Press, 1989).
- 5 Robert A. Irwin, *Building a Peace System* (Washington, DC: ExPro Press, 1989). He can be contacted c/o Sociology Department, Brandeis University, Waltham MA 02254, USA.
- 6 PIOOM, c/o COMT, Leiden University, Wassenaarseweg 52, 2333 AK Leiden, The Netherlands.
- 7 Alex P. Schmid, *Research on Gross Human Rights Violations: A Programme* (Leiden: Center for the Study of Social Conflicts, University of Leiden, second edition, 1989).