2
Nonviolence

For many purposes, nonviolence is easier to explain through examples than definitions or theory.[1] And what better example than Gandhi's famous march to Dandi in 1930? India was then under British rule and ruthlessly exploited. The British claimed a monopoly on the manufacture of salt, taxed it and arrested any Indians who made it. Gandhi decided illegal production of salt from sea water would be a good form of civil disobedience. To maximise the impact of this act, he marched with his followers for 24 days on the way to the small coastal village of Dandi, telling about the planned act along the way and picking up hundreds of adherents. By the time the march reached Dandi, it had already served as a powerful organising method. The salt-making and arrests then served to dramatise the injustice of British rule. Similar salt-making civil disobedience actions took place simultaneously across India.[2]

This sort of organising would not have been possible if the aim was a violent resistance. Openness would not have been possible, either in recruitment, training or action. Participation would have been limited. Finally, violent attacks often have the effect of unifying the opponents and alienating potential supporters. The march to Dandi, in contrast, did far more to undermine support for the British and win sympathy from observers.

The US civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s made excellent use of nonviolent action.[3] In the US South, slaves had been freed in the 1860s but blacks[4] continued to be oppressed by the practice of segregation, with denial of equal opportunity and retribution for those who bucked the system. In 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama, civil rights activist Rosa Parks sat in the white section of a bus, in planned defiance of the segregation laws. After she was arrested, blacks in the city boycotted the buses, many of them walking long distances to work.

The civil rights movement picked up momentum, with additional boycotts, "freedom rides" (blacks and whites on buses together travelling through the South), sit-ins to desegregate lunch counters, marches through segregated cities, road blockades and rallies. The civil rights movement made enormous strides especially through the early 1960s.

The peace movement worldwide has made extensive use of nonviolent action. There is a long tradition of war resistance, namely men refusing to go to war or to be in the army. In war after war there have been men who have gone to prison for refusing military service; in some countries they are persecuted or even killed. Others claim exemption from military service as conscientious objectors or emigrate to avoid conscription.

Many creative actions are used by peace activists to protest against wars, arms production and export, weapons systems and military support for repressive regimes. At Greenham Common in the UK, women protested against the US military base in numerous ways. They maintained a presence for years, held rallies, repeatedly entered the camp (acts of civil disobedience) and sought to win over soldiers and observers.

Other types of peace protest have included marches (including some across continents), rallies, vigils, street theatre, human blockades of trains carrying weapons, trade union bans of arms shipments, sailing ships into nuclear test zones and pouring blood on military documents.

In recent decades, the environmental movement has made heavy use of nonviolent action. Forest activists, for example, have put themselves in the way of bulldozers and chain saws, sometimes locking themselves to equipment in order to hinder operations. Others have placed themselves in vulnerable positions in front of ships carrying rainforest products, using kayaks or even by swimming.

These sorts of dramatic actions are only the tip of the iceberg of activity by social movements. Behind effective actions there is usually a vast amount of work in analysing the situation, preparing for action, nonviolent action training, mobilising support and coordinating the action. For every individual on the "front line" in a dangerous or challenging action, there may be dozens behind the scenes arranging meetings, transport, food, child care, posters, public statements, media liaison, legal support, fund raising and much else.

A few highlights of nonviolent action may be thrilling and dramatic, but there is lots of routine work necessary to support these visible actions. This is not so different from military operations: a fighter pilot's sortie is backed by the work of aircraft designers, builders, testers, maintenance workers, planners, accountants, cooks and many others.

Furthermore, the most visible and risky actions do not necessarily have more impact than other sorts of action. Sometimes the most effective methods may be quiet work in talking to neighbours, producing leaflets, holding small meetings and writing letters. Sometimes the most effective actions are personal behaviour in not using certain products, voicing disapproval of a popular policy or being friendly with a stigmatised person. Whether or not these methods are called nonviolent action, they are certainly part of the process of social change from the grassroots.

Nonviolent action has been used to thwart military coups, sometimes with dramatic success. In 1920 there was a military coup in Germany, led by Wolfgang Kapp. The putschists captured the capital, Berlin, and the elected government fled to Stuttgart, where it advocated nonviolent resistance. There was a general strike in Berlin and massive rallies. Noncooperation was an effective tool of resistance. Typists refused to type Kapp's proclamations and bank officials refused to cash his cheques without appropriate signatures, and all authorised signatories refused to sign. The coup collapsed after just four days.[5]

Algeria used to be a colony of France. From 1954 there was an armed struggle for independence, leading to huge loss of life. In August 1961, as the French government made moves towards granting independence, anti-independence French generals in Algeria staged a coup. There was even a possibility of invasion of France. Many French soldiers in Algeria, most of them conscripts, refused to cooperate, simply staying in their quarters. Many pilots took off but flew their planes elsewhere so they could not be used by the generals. As well, there were massive protests in France. The revolt collapsed after just a few days without a single person killed.[6]

There are numerous cases of repressive governments toppled by nonviolent action, especially in Central and South America.[7] In 1944, the repressive military regime in El Salvador was easily able to put down a military revolt. But soon after there was a nonviolent

insurrection. University students began a strike, which was soon joined by high school students, then over a period of weeks by physicians and business people, until virtually the entire country was at a standstill. Police shot at some boys, killing one. This led to massive protest in the streets. The dictator, Martínez, did not risk using military troops against the crowds. The troops were reliable against the military revolt but were less so in the face of popular opposition. Martínez left the country just six weeks after the beginning of the nonviolent insurrection.[8]

Finally, there are a few cases where nonviolent resistance has had a degree of success against military invasion. In 1968 Warsaw Pact troops invaded Czechoslovakia to put an end to the liberalisation of communist rule there, so-called "socialism with a human face." There was no military resistance, which the Czechoslovak military judged to be futile. Instead, there was a unified nonviolent resistance, from Czechoslovak political leaders to the citizens. One of the most effective forms of opposition was fraternisation: talking to the invading troops, telling them about what was really going on—they had been told they were there to stop a capitalist restoration—and encouraging them to support the resistance. The initial aim in the invasion was to set up a puppet government; this was not attained for eight months: leaders of the Czechoslovak Communist Party refused to cooperate with the invaders and no alternative leaders could be found. The invasion backfired badly on the Soviet Union, discrediting its policies worldwide and causing splits or policy switches in many foreign communist parties.[9]

Thus on numerous occasions nonviolent action has demonstrated its effectiveness when used by social movements and against military coups, dictatorships and invasions. But what about social revolution, seen by some as the ultimate goal? Perhaps the best example is the Iranian revolution of 1978-1979, which was largely carried out by nonviolent means.[10] The Shah's regime was a ruthless one, using imprisonment and torture against dissidents and even at random just to strike terror into opponents. It was highly armed and had diplomatic support from all major powers, including the US, Soviet Union, Israel and most Arab states.

As protest developed in 1978, police fired on a crowd, killing several people. In Islamic tradition, a mourning procession was held 40 days later. The procession turned into a political protest, and

troops were used again. This process of killing, mourning and protest occurred at various locations around the country, causing an escalation in the resistance, with secular opponents joining the processions. Workers joined by going on strike and instituting go-slows in factories, until virtually the entire economy ground to a halt. As rallies became larger, more and people were shot dead in the streets. But eventually troops refused to fire and the Shah fled the country.

The death toll in Iran was horrific, a total in the tens of thousands. But this was small compared to many armed liberation struggles. For example, many hundreds of thousands of people were killed in the Algerian war for independence, out of a smaller population than Iran's.

It is important to note that not all uses of nonviolent action lead to long-lasting, worthwhile change. Nonviolent action is not guaranteed to succeed either in the short term or long term. The 1989 prodemocracy movement in China, after a short flowering, was crushed in the Beijing massacre. Perhaps more worrying are the dispiriting aftermaths following some short-term successes of nonviolent action. In El Salvador in 1944, the successful nonviolent insurrection against the Martínez dictatorship did not lead to long term improvement for the El Salvadorean people. There was a military coup later in 1944, and continued repression in following decades.

The aftermath of the Iranian revolution was equally disastrous. The new Islamic regime led by Ayatollah Khomeini was just as ruthless as its predecessor in stamping out dissent.

At this point it is valuable to point to the role of planning in nonviolent action. Nonviolent action in social movements, such as the Indian independence movement, the US civil rights movement, the peace movement and the environmental movement, is usually backed up by a fair amount of analysis, preparation, training and mobilisation. Activists think through what they are trying to achieve and pick their methods and opportunities carefully. By doing plenty of preparatory work and by careful planning, the odds are increased that outcomes will be positive and the movement can build strength and attain its goals.

In contrast, many of the dramatic actions against coups, dictatorships and invasions have been largely spontaneous. In the cases of the Kapp Putsch, the Algerian Generals' Revolt, the nonviolent insurrection in El Salvador, the Czechoslovak resistance to the Soviet

invasion and the Iranian Revolution, there was little or no preparation, planning or training. In essence, nonviolent action in these cases was largely spontaneous.

Spontaneity is not a reliable basis for success or long-term change. An army could hardly be expected to be successful without recruitment, weapons, training and leadership. Why should nonviolent action be fundamentally different?

What this suggests is that the power of nonviolent action is yet to be fully realised. Military methods have been used systematically for centuries, with vast resources devoted to train soldiers, build weapons and develop strategies. Revolutionary violence has had far fewer resources, but even these have been substantial. By comparison, nonviolent action has had only minimal support and a low level of development.

Nonviolent action

Gene Sharp gives this description: "Nonviolent action is a generic term covering dozens of specific methods of protest, noncooperation and intervention, in all of which the actionists conduct the conflict by doing—or refusing to do—certain things without using physical violence."[11] In his classic work *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* he catalogued 198 different methods, and since then he has discovered hundreds more. Some methods of nonviolent protest and persuasion are public speeches, petitions, banners, picketing, wearing of symbols, fraternisation, skits, religious processions, homage at burial places, teach-ins and renouncing honours. Some methods of noncooperation are social boycott, student strike, providing sanctuary, hijrat (protest emigration), consumers' boycott, refusal to rent, traders' boycott, lockout, refusal to pay debts, international trade embargo, lightning strike, prisoners' strike, sympathy strike, working-to-rule strike, economic shutdown, boycott of elections, refusal to accept appointed officials, civil disobedience, deliberate inefficiency, mutiny, severance of diplomatic recognition and expulsion from international bodies. Methods of nonviolent intervention include fasting, sit-ins, nonviolent obstruction, guerrilla theatre, stay-in strike, seizure of assets, alternative markets, revealing identities of spies and alternative government.

Nonviolent action is just what its name suggests: it is action rather than nonaction, and it avoids physical violence. Nonviolent action

can be coercive and can cause (nonphysical) harm. Strikes, boycotts and sit-ins can all cause economic harm to a business. Noncooperation with political officials and alternative systems for decision making can cause political harm to a government official. Ostracism can cause psychological distress to an individual. Nonviolent action is, after all, a method of waging conflict. If it is going to be effective, it has to make some impact.

Nonviolent action does not involve physical violence. That rules out beatings, imprisonment, torture and killing. Nonviolent action is for waging conflict, so it does not include routine activities such as attending a meeting, voting in an election, buying vegetables or reading a newspaper—unless, due to circumstances, they are integral parts of a conflict. For example, if a government outlaws carrots, then growing, selling and buying carrots could be a form of nonviolent action.

A crucial issue is whether nonviolent action is used for a "good" purpose. Of course, what is considered good depends on who is judging. Cutting off funds, for example, can be used either to support or oppose racial segregation. In 1956, the legislature in the state of Virginia passed a law to cut off state funding for any school that racially integrated.[12] In contrast, the international campaign against apartheid in South Africa included withdrawal of investment. In the Gandhian approach, acting against repression or oppression are an essential part of the idea of nonviolent action, whereas in the pragmatic approach exemplified by Sharp, nonviolent action is simply a method which can be used for good or bad. Here, the term "satyagraha" is used for the Gandhian conception and "nonviolent action" for the pragmatic one. In practice, even those using the pragmatic conception usually refer to examples where nonviolent action is used to challenge oppression.

Just because nonviolent action can be used for good and bad purposes does not mean it is a neutral method. Weapons can be used for good and bad purposes, but they are not neutral because they are easier to use for harm than for social benefit. A guided missile is a tool with a built-in bias: it is easy to use to destroy and kill, though in principle it could be used to foster harmony, for example by being an object of worship! Nonviolent action is also a tool with a built-in bias: it is easier to use against oppression than for it. To understand why, it is useful to list some of the strengths of nonviolent action.

• For those seeking to create a world without violence, nonviolent action is self-consistent: it uses only those methods that are compatible with the goal. This is unlike military defence, which relies on the threat of violence to prevent war.

• Nonviolent action allows maximum participation in social struggle. Nearly anyone can sign a petition or join a boycott or vigil without regard to sex, age or ability. This is unlike military or guerrilla forces, which put a premium on physical fitness and often exclude women, children and the elderly.

• Nonviolent action often works better than violence, since it is more likely to win over opponents and third parties. It often works better than using official channels for change, such as formal complaints to governments, court actions or elections, since nonviolent action can be used by those without administrative impact, legal support or electoral influence.

• Nonviolent action often leads to more lasting change, because it mobilises more of the population in a participatory fashion than either violence or official channels.

• Compared to violent struggle, nonviolent action usually leads to fewer casualties. Although violence can be and is used against nonviolent protesters, this is usually less intense and sustained than against armed opposition, since it is easier to justify violence against a violent opponent. Note, though, that nonviolent action is not guaranteed to cause fewer deaths and injuries.[13]

If these are some of the strengths of nonviolent action, what are the weaknesses? Of course, nonviolent action may not work, but then no method is guaranteed to work in every circumstance. Therefore it is useful to compare nonviolent action to two alternatives: violence (armed struggle) and official channels (such as operating through bureaucracies, courts and governments).

• Nonviolent discipline can be hard to sustain. A small number of participants who become violent or run away can be damaging to an action. Military forces use force to maintain discipline, for example by imposing punishments on those who refuse orders and by court-marshalling deserters. Official channels have their own requirements, such as forms to fill out and payments to make: those who do not follow the rules usually make little progress. Nonviolent discipline relies more on moral sanctions than do the military and bureaucracies.

• Mobilising support for nonviolent action can be difficult. Military forces can employ soldiers or use conscription. Government departments hire employees. So far, most nonviolent activists have been volunteers.

• Nonviolent action has an image problem. From the point of view of those who favour or are used to armed struggle, nonviolent action seems weak. A standard assumption is that the side with the greater capacity for inflicting violence will necessarily win in a struggle. From the point of view of those who favour official channels, nonviolent action is inappropriate, illegitimate or illegal.

• As a pragmatic method for reform, nonviolent action may not lead to lasting change. As noted above, there have been some spectacular nonviolent campaigns against dictatorial regimes, but the aftermath has seen a new system of oppression. On a smaller scale, nonviolent protests may lead to a change in government policy that is quietly reversed once the protesters are gone.

• As a systematic alternative, nonviolent action has extremely radical implications. To run a society without systems of violence would mean that governments and corporations could not survive without widespread support. Completely different arrangements might be needed for organising work, community services and defence.

Nonviolent action thus has many strengths but also a number of weaknesses. Several of the strengths are important for challenging capitalism, especially self-consistency, participation and forging lasting change. It is also important for activists to be aware of and try to overcome the weaknesses, especially the reversal of changes made through nonviolent action and the need for a full-scale alternative to capitalism.

It might seem that there is a contradiction in saying that nonviolent action can lead to more lasting change and yet that many of the changes brought about are susceptible to reversal. The resolution is to note that nonviolent action can lead to more lasting change than violence or official channels, especially because it is through a participatory process, but even so reversal of this change is still a great risk. To bring about long-lasting change without using violence is bound to be difficult, and to use violence is to risk causing enormous suffering.

Severe repression[14]

A common argument against nonviolent action is that it can't work against severe repression. What about ruthless invaders who just keep killing people at the least hint of resistance? What can be done to stop a programme of total extermination? How can nonviolent action possibly work against repressive regimes such as the dictatorships of Hitler and Stalin?

It is worthwhile exploring various responses to these questions. Nonviolent resistance *can* be successful against very repressive regimes. As described earlier, the Iranian revolution occurred in the face of a ruthless military and torture apparatus. Against the Nazis, there was effective nonviolent resistance in several countries, including Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands.[15] However, nonviolence was not tried, in a big way, against the Nazis. Many Germans were ardent supporters of the Nazis, and many people in other countries were admirers as well. Supporters of military methods tended to be especially favourable to the Nazis.

There was no concerted attempt from outside Germany to undermine the Nazis using nonviolent methods. Stephen King-Hall gives a telling account of how he tried futilely as late as 1939 to drum up British government support for a campaign to undermine the German people's support for Hitler.[16] There has been no further study on this issue, so it must be considered a possibility that concerted nonviolent attack from around the world could have undermined or restrained the Nazi regime.

Throughout the rule of the Nazis, there *was* a German opposition to Hitler. This internal opposition was not fostered by the Allies, nor was it given sufficient credit by postwar writers.[17]

To take another example, consider the 1990 invasion of Kuwait by the Iraqi military under Saddam Hussein. Nonviolent resistance by the Kuwaiti people was probably not a possibility, since Kuwait was a grossly unequal and authoritarian society, so it would have been difficult to build a popular base for nonviolent resistance. The time to stop Saddam Hussein was much earlier, in the 1980s. Nonviolent opposition was required then against the governments of Iraq, Kuwait and others in the Gulf region that were repressive and undemocratic.

A principal reason why Saddam Hussein's Iraq became such a military power and threat was the support given by outside powers.

The Iraqi invasion of Iran in 1980 was supported by the governments of the US, Soviet Union and many other countries. Numerous companies sold Saddam Hussein arms and technologies of repression. Governments were silent about his use of chemical weapons against Iranians and against Kurds in Iraq and about his brutal repression of political opponents in Iraq. He was given diplomatic support right up until the invasion of Kuwait.

Since many governments gave Saddam Hussein support during the 1980s, a key role for nonviolent action should have been to expose and oppose the hypocritical foreign policies of Western governments. That is a lesson for the future. There are plenty of repressive regimes in the world today being given full support by Western governments.

Real-life dictatorships are not as all-powerful as might be imagined. Under the brutal military regimes in Argentina and Chile in the 1970s and 1980s, many individuals continued to openly express opposition in the workplace, in public protests and in the media. Student protests shook the harsh regimes in South Korea and Burma. If nonviolent resistance could be prepared for and expanded, then dictatorships would be difficult to sustain.

For example, consider the courageous stand of publisher Jacobo Timerman in Argentina, who maintained his newspaper's open resistance until he was arrested and tortured. An international campaign led to his release and he wrote about his experiences in a powerful book. His efforts were among those that contributed to the collapse of the generals' regime in the country.[18]

Ruthlessness—namely, the psychology of the ruler—may not be the key factor. Instead, the real issue is how to make the ruler dependent in some way on the nonviolent resisters. This might be economic dependence or it could be the influence of family members who know people in the resistance. If there is a dependency relationship, then the ruler will encounter great obstacles if severe repression is used, because pressure will increase on the ruler. But if there isn't some direct or indirect connection between the two sides, then even a fairly benevolent ruler may do really nasty things.[19]

The issue of severe repression highlights the issue of suffering. In the Gandhian tradition, suffering by nonviolent activists is a primary mechanism for the effectiveness of nonviolent action, since recognition of this suffering is supposed to "melt the hearts" of opponents.

Acceptance of the inevitability of suffering has been criticised, especially by feminists, as perpetuating submissive and dependent orientations that have been imposed on subordinate groups for too long. A more pragmatic response is to note that suffering is seldom effective in converting those dispensing violence. In the case of the 1930 salt satyagraha, the police who brutally attacked protesters were not greatly deterred by the suffering they caused. However, the campaign was influential due to impact on people around the world who read about it through the reports of journalist Webb Miller.[20] So the key to winning over others was a chain of observers and communicators who passed on information about the campaign until it reached those who were ultimately responsible, in this case the British government. This process has been called the "great chain of nonviolence."[21]

Not all methods of nonviolent action open activists to physical attack. Boycotts, for example, are relatively safe compared to sit-ins. If repression is harsh, methods and tactics need to be specially chosen. More use can be made of quiet "mistakes" in carrying out tasks and "misunderstandings" of orders. Preparation in advance is crucial for things such as shutting down factories, protecting dissidents, providing food and shelter for survival, maintaining communications and exposing repression to the world. When support for the resistance becomes widespread, open defiance becomes possible.

In many countries, challenging capitalism is not as likely to lead to brutal physical attacks as would, for example, opposing a harsh dictatorship. In the normal operation of capitalism, suffering is imposed through economic mechanisms, such as job losses, destruction of livelihoods, injuries on the job and harm from dangerous products. As will be seen in later chapters, dealing with capitalist repression is less difficult than dealing with the attractions of the consumer society.

A nonviolent society
Nonviolent action is often thought of as just a set of methods, but it also is the basis for a way of life. There are several ways to approach this. One is the constructive programme, part of Gandhi's legacy. It involves taking positive measures to overcome poverty, discrimination, exploitation and other social ills by grassroots efforts to build supportive and vibrant communities. Nonviolent action is often a

"negative" process: it is used against systems of domination. The essential complementary process is the building of systems without domination.

The constructive programme can be interpreted as a programme of service, namely support and aid for those in greatest need. Another dimension of creating a nonviolent society is the creation of social, political and economic arrangements that minimise oppression. This might be called the "institution building" side of the constructive programme. It includes, for example, workplaces in which workers and community members make decisions about what to produce and how work is done. There is more on this in chapter 5, which covers nonviolent alternatives to capitalism.

Yet another dimension to a nonviolent society is appropriate technology.[22] Technology, which includes everything from hoes, shoes, televisions and needles to jet aircraft and supercomputers, is both a product of society and a reflection of political and economic values. Some technologies are more supportive of a nonviolent society than others. For example, interactive communication media such as the post, telephone and email provide fewer opportunities for domination than do one-directional media such as newspapers and television. One way to help build a nonviolent society is by choosing and developing technologies that support self-reliance.[23]

This outline gives only the briefest introduction to possibilities for a nonviolent society. The point is that nonviolent action as a method is only one part of the picture. The method needs to be tied to an alternative.

The consent theory of power
Gandhi approached nonviolent action as a moral issue and, in practical terms, as a means for persuading opponents to change their minds as a result of their witnessing the commitment and willing sacrifice of nonviolent activists. While this approach explains some aspects of the power of nonviolent action, it is inadequate on its own. Moral persuasion sometimes works in face-to-face encounters, but has little chance when cause and effect are separated. Bomber pilots show little remorse for the agony caused by their weapons detonating far below,[24] while managers of large international banks have little inkling of the suffering caused by their lending policies in foreign countries.

For insight into both the strengths and weaknesses of nonviolent action, in particular for dealing with capitalism, it is useful to turn to the consent theory of power, proposed by Gene Sharp as the theoretical foundation for his study of the politics of nonviolent action.[25] Sharp is the world's foremost nonviolence scholar. Although his work has received little attention from other scholars, it is enormously influential in nonviolence circles. His theory of power is often presented as the theory component in nonviolent action training.

The essence of Sharp's theory of power is quite simple:
• people in society can 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 the key modern problems of dictatorship, genocide, war and systems of oppression.

The two key concepts here are the ruler-subject classification and the idea of consent. The "ruler" includes "not only chief executives but also ruling groups and all bodies in command of the State structure."[26] Sharp focuses on the state,[27] spelling out the various structures involved, especially the state bureaucracy, police and military. All those besides the rulers are the subjects.

Sharp defines political power, which is one type of social power, as "the totality of means, influences, and pressures—including authority, rewards, and sanctions—available for use to achieve the objectives of the power-holder, especially the institutions of government, the State, and groups opposing either of them."[28] Sharp counterposes his analysis to the common idea that power is a monolithic entity residing in the person or position of a ruler or ruling body. He argues instead that power is pluralistic, residing with a variety of groups and in a diversity of locations, which he calls "loci of power." The loci of power provide a countervailing force against the power of the ruler, especially when the loci are numerous and widely distributed throughout society.

Accepting the argument that power is not intrinsic to rulers, then it must come from somewhere else. Sharp gives the following key sources of power: authority, human resources, skills and knowledge, intangible factors, material resources and sanctions. What is the basis for these sources of power? This is where the second key concept of Sharp's enters in. He says that "these sources of the ruler's power depend *intimately* upon the obedience and cooperation of the

subjects."[29] Without the consent of the subjects—either their active support or their passive acquiescence—the ruler would have little power and little basis for rule.

Power for Sharp is always contingent and precarious, requiring cultivation of cooperation and manipulation of potentially antagonistic loci. His consideration of the sources of power thus leads him to obedience as the key: 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."[30]

Sharp's focus on obedience then leads him to ask why people obey. He suggests that there is no single answer, but that important are habit, fear of sanctions, moral obligation, self-interest, psychological identification with the ruler, zones of indifference and absence of self-confidence among subjects.

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 interested in activity, challenge and struggle, in particular with nonviolent methods of action.

The consent picture works best, as theory, when there is an obvious oppressor. Sharp refers regularly to Stalinism and Nazism, and his examples of challenges to authority mostly deal with situations widely perceived as oppressive by Western political judgement. Capitalism is not included. While Sharp gives numerous examples of nonviolent action by workers, he offers no examination of capitalism as a system of power.

One reason for this is that the ruler-subject model does not fit capitalism all that well. True, the traditional Marxist classifications of bourgeoisie and proletariat—ruling class and working class—seem to fit a ruler-subject picture. But classes, according to Marx, are defined by their relation to the means of production. Can withdrawal of consent be used to change relationships to means of production? It is not a matter of just withdrawing consent from a particular factory owner, but of withdrawing consent from ownership itself. How to achieve that is not so obvious.

Capitalism is a system of exchange, based on markets for goods, services and labour power. In all of these there is an element of

reciprocity. In a retail shop, the exchange is money for goods. In employment, the exchange is money for labour. Oppression in capitalism is built into the exchange system, for example in the surplus extracted by owners, in the alienation of workers, in the degradation of the environment and in dependency of Third World economies. A boycott is a method for withdrawing consent, but can it be used to withdraw consent from the exchange system itself, or from its oppressive elements? Because exchange involves each party both giving and getting something, the idea of rulers and subjects does not fit all that well.

In some workplaces the owner-boss is like a ruler, directly ordering workers around. But in corporate bureaucracies of any size, domination is more diffuse and complex. Many workers both exercise power over subordinates and are subject to superiors. Furthermore, there may be cross-cutting systems of authority, so that formal power depends on the task.

Likewise, in the marketplace, individuals may be both buyers and sellers, with a different exchange and power relationship from situation to situation. The idea of withdrawing power from a ruler does not make a lot of sense in these circumstances.

Thus, because capitalism is a system of cross-cutting relationships, in which oppression is built into the system of exchange as well as exercised through direct domination, the consent theory is not so obviously applicable. The challenge is to modify or supplement consent theory to make it more relevant to capitalism.

Besides capitalism, other systems of power have similar complexities, including patriarchy,[31] bureaucracy and racism. Actually, even systems of domination that seem to fit the ruler-subject model are much more complex. Stalinism was not just a matter of Stalin himself wielding power by consent of the people. A fuller understanding of Stalinism would require analysing the mobilisation of support and suppression of dissent through the Communist Party, the process of industrialisation, the reconstitution of the hierarchical army in the 1918-1921 war against the Western attack on the revolution, the social inheritance of Tsarism and the international political environment.

One of the intriguing aspects of consent theory is that although it has considerable theoretical shortcomings, it is remarkably well suited for activists. Unlike Marxism, which is a theory built around collec-

tivities, social relationships and large-scale processes (classes, base-superstructure, hegemony), consent theory is individualistic and voluntaristic. It immediately implies that individuals can make a difference: all they need to do is withdraw consent and the power of rulers is undermined. This can actually be quite effective, because experienced and perceptive activists often have a remarkably good grasp of power structures, especially local ones. Through their own understanding of complexities of power, they essentially provide the structural analysis that is missing from consent theory. In turn, consent theory provides activists with an easy way to grasp that their own actions can have an impact. The theory, of course, does not provide detailed guidance on what actions to take in particular circumstances, nor a guarantee of success. Therefore activists are seldom under illusions about the difficulty of their task: preparation, training and careful decision making are required.

This suggests that to develop a nonviolent challenge to capitalism, a key factor is for activists to have an understanding of how capitalism works, from the point of view of nonviolent intervention. That is the topic of the next chapter.

Notes

1 For case studies, see 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); Souad R. Dajani, *Eyes Without Country: Searching for a Palestinian Strategy of Liberation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); 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); Andrew Rigby, *Living the Intifada* (London: Zed Books, 1991); Dick Scott, *Ask That Mountain: The Story of Parihaka* (Auckland: Heinemann Educational Books/ Southern Cross Books, 1975); 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.

2 Thomas Weber, *On the Salt March: The Historiography of Gandhi's March to Dandi* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 1997). On Gandhi's approach to nonviolence more generally, see 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).

On the practicalities of nonviolent action, 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); Narayan Desai, *Handbook for Satyagraphis: A Manual for Volunteers of Total Revolution* (New Delhi: Gandhi Peace Foundation; Philadelphia: Movement for a New Society, 1980); Per Herngren, *Path of Resistance: The Practice of Civil Disobedience* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1993); Martin Jelfs, *Manual for Action* (London: Action Resources Group, 1982).

3 Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988); David Halberstam, *The Children* (New York: Random House, 1998); Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969).

4 Terminology has changed. "Negro" was the accepted term at the beginning of the civil rights movement, "black" became standard in the 1960s and more recently "African-American" has been used.

5 D. J. Goodspeed, *The Conspirators: A Study of the Coup d'État* (London: Macmillan, 1962).

6 Adam Roberts, "Civil resistance to military coups," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 12, 1975, pp. 19-36.

7 Patricia Parkman, *Insurrectionary Civic Strikes in Latin America 1931-1961* (Cambridge, MA: Albert Einstein Institution, 1990); Stephen Zunes, "Unarmed insurrections against authoritarian governments in the Third World: a new kind of revolution," *Third World Quarterly,* Vol. 15, No. 3, 1994, pp. 403-426.

8 Patricia Parkman, *Nonviolent Insurrection in El Salvador: The Fall of Maximiliano Hernández Martínez* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1988).

9 H. Gordon Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976); Philip Windson and Adam

Roberts, *Czechoslovakia 1968: Reform, Repression and Resistance* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1969).

10 David H. Albert (ed.), *Tell the American People: Perspectives on the Iranian Revolution* (Philadelphia: Movement for a New Society, 1980); Fereydoun Hoveyda, *The Fall of the Shah* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980).

11 Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973), p. 64.

12 Sharp, p. 240.

13 This point is made forcefully by Gene Keyes, "Heavy casualties and nonviolent defense," *Philosophy and Social Action*, Vol. 17, Nos. 3-4, July-December 1991, pp. 75-88.

14 This section is adapted from Brian Martin, "Social defence: arguments and actions," in Shelley Anderson and Janet Larmore (eds.), *Nonviolent Struggle and Social Defence* (London: War Resisters' International, 1991), pp. 81-141, at pp. 99-107.

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

16 Stephen King-Hall, *Total Victory* (London: Faber and Faber, 1941), appendix 3.

17 Hans Rothfels, *The German Opposition to Hitler* (London: Oswald Wolff, 1961). See also Werner Rings, *Life with the Enemy: Collaboration and Resistance in Hitler's Europe 1939-1945* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982).

18 Jacobo Timerman, *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number* (New York: Vintage, 1982).

19 Ralph Summy, "Nonviolence and the case of the extremely ruthless opponent," *Pacifica Review,* Vol. 6, No. 1, May-June 1994, pp. 1-29.

20 Thomas Weber, "'The marchers simply walked forward until struck down': nonviolent suffering and conversion," *Peace & Change*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 1993, pp. 267-289.

21 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.

22 Godfrey Boyle, Peter Harper and the editors of *Undercurrents* (eds.), *Radical Technology* (London: Wildwood House, 1976); Ken Darrow and Mike Saxenian (eds.), *Appropriate Technology Sourcebook: A Guide to Practical Books for Village and Small Community Technology* (Stanford, CA: Volunteers in Asia, 1986); Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1973)

23 Johan Galtung, Peter O'Brien and Roy Preiswerk (eds.), *Self-Reliance: A Strategy for Development* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture, 1980).

24 For an excellent treatment of the psychodynamics of killing, see Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995).

25 See especially Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973), pp. 7-62 and Gene Sharp, *Social Power and Political Freedom* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1980), pp. 21-67 and 309-378. The following analysis is drawn from, and includes extracts from, Brian Martin, "Gene Sharp's theory of power," *Journal of Peace Research,* Vol. 26, No. 2, 1989, pp. 213-222.

26 Sharp, *Social Power and Political Freedom,* p. 22.

27 The term "the state" is used to refer to the system of government and government-run institutions, including the military, police, courts, government departments for taxation, welfare, education and so forth, and government-owned enterprises.

28 Sharp, *Social Power and Political Freedom,* p. 27.

29 Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action,* p. 12.

30 Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action,* p. 16.

31 On patriarchy and consent theory, see 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.