

1 Introduction

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

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

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

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

vocal protests. This was taken up enthusiastically.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- refusal by Norwegian teachers in 1942 to teach Nazi doctrine;¹³

- Indian independence struggles led by Gandhi, 1920s to 1940s.¹⁴

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When action is absent or at a lower level

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Words

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Why nonviolent action is needed

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Overview

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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