

## BOOK REVIEWS

Kurt Schock. *Unarmed Insurrections: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.

Although there is a large and growing body of scholarship about non-violent action, mainstream disciplines pay surprisingly little attention to it. For example, Gene Sharp's pioneering contributions have received scant recognition in political science or sociology. Possible explanations for this neglect include the assumptions that violence is invariably superior to nonviolence and that theory should look at structures and causes rather than actions and tactics.

In this context, Kurt Schock's *Unarmed Insurrections* is a breath of fresh scholarship, ambitiously connecting nonviolence theory with social movement theory. It uses as case material six major insurrections in the past two decades: in South Africa, the Philippines, Burma, China, Nepal, and Thailand. At the time, these were all "nondemocracies," namely various forms of authoritarian or dictatorial rule, such as apartheid in South Africa, dictatorship in the Philippines, and communist rule in China. The cases include the successful, such as the ending of apartheid, and the unsuccessful, exemplified by the crushing of the Chinese pro-democracy movement in the 1989 events in Tiananmen Square.

Schock aims to uncover the complexities of each of these cases, including the country's social and political history, international factors, the regime's strengths and weaknesses, and the tactics used by the regime's opponents. Thus, he goes well beyond the "just so" stories found in some studies of nonviolent action whose main function is to demonstrate the power of nonviolence.

Some of the cases are familiar, others less so. Schock's major contribution is not historical—he uses a wide range of secondary sources—but theoretical. He interrogates each case using two approaches: nonviolence theory and social movement theory. It might seem obvious that these two bodies of theory have much to say to each other, but earlier work has only touched on their connections.

Schock gives a thorough account of each theory, drawing on a wide range of scholarship. His treatment of nonviolence is exemplary in showing its connection to other theories and, thus, pulling it out of a sort of "nonviolence ghetto" within the social sciences. Early in the book, he lists nineteen common misconceptions about nonviolent action, many held by scholars unfamiliar with the nonviolence literature. The first one, for example, is "Nonviolent action is not inaction"—obvious enough, perhaps, except that this way of thinking has shaped scholarly as well as popular attitudes to nonviolence.

Schock ably interprets the nonviolence field for people outside it. For example, he explains that Sharp uses the words "pluralism" and "consent" in ways different from most sociologists, thereby creating the possibility of misunderstanding.

Social movement theory, more specifically the approach to social movements called political process theory, is Schock's other main tool. He points out that nonviolence theory, with its emphasis on agency, fills a gap in social movement theory, while political process theory, with its attention to social structures that enable or hinder action and change, gives an understanding of context that is largely absent in nonviolence theory. His highly targeted use of political process theory gives the book its analytical edge, though some readers might prefer a more broad-ranging treatment of theories on social action.

Schock positions himself clearly in the pragmatic tradition of nonviolence, following Sharp and others who look to nonviolence for its effectiveness, rather than following the tradition of Gandhi based on a principled objection to violence. Furthermore, Schock refuses to idealize nonviolence. He does not assume that it is superior. Instead, he wants to examine its use in practice.

That is why the case studies are important: they provide a test bed for an examination of nonviolent action in practice—including both successes and failures—and the value of nonviolence theory and political process theory. To this end, each case study is presented first as a story of a struggle and afterwards analyzed using the two theories.

The insights from this analysis are many. One is the value of a decentralized organization for challengers. In some contexts, it is possible to organize more or less openly, as in Gandhi's campaigns in India and in the U.S. civil rights movement. These struggles had to confront repression, but nothing like what movements encounter in really repressive regimes, where authorities make little distinction between armed and unarmed opposition. When the opposition is decentralized but

coordinated—for example through umbrella organizations—the movement is more resilient in the face of attack, is more flexible and responsive to opportunities, and is more likely to be participatory.

This may sound obvious enough to grassroots activists, but it is a challenge to some traditional left organizational styles with their assumption of centralized command and a correct line. It is also something that is not readily derived from social movement theory, which gives little guidance to activists on the ground.

As well as using the theories to examine the case studies, Schock uses the case studies to reflect on the theories, including both their strengths and weaknesses. This is an especially valuable contribution. Certainly nonviolence theory has not often enough received constructive, informed critique. Schock also points to ways that political process theory could be augmented by taking on insights about nonviolent action.

The book concludes with “lessons of struggle.” Among the lessons are the value of clear and limited goals, the value of using many different methods of nonviolent action, and the value of communication both within the movement and to wider audiences. These lessons derive their meaning from the six case studies from which they were derived and which they illuminate.

*Unarmed Insurrections* is not a practical handbook, nor will it appeal to those favoring the Gandhian tradition of principled nonviolence. The book is primarily a work of scholarship, comprehensively referenced, well written, and engaging with both theory and case material with a practical orientation. It is an essential source for nonviolence scholars. But it has a much larger potential audience: sociologists, political scientists, and other scholars of social action. Schock has tried heroically to bridge the gap between nonviolence and mainstream social science. If this effort does not succeed, the fault will not be his.

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Hilary N. Summy. *“Peace Angel” of World War I: Dissent of Margaret Thorp*. Brisbane, Queensland: Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Queensland, 2006.

In this first monograph published by the Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, Hilary N. Summy performs the valuable functions