



Beyond nonviolent regime change: Anarchist insights

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Abstract

In recent years, a major focus of research and campaigning on strategic nonviolent action has been on movements to oust authoritarian rulers. However, these “nonviolent revolutions” usually do not transform systems of economic and social domination. To motivate appreciation of what might be involved in a more far-reaching social transformation, selected anarchist themes offer useful guides. The relevance of four principles of anarchist theory and practice—non-hierarchy, self-management, direct action, and prefiguration—is illustrated in the South African struggle against apartheid. Activists should consider how to use nonviolent strategies to move beyond systems of domination based on states and capitalism.

INTRODUCTION

A major focus in recent research on nonviolent action has been on how unarmed populations can topple dictators. The fall of Eastern European communist regimes in 1989 and the so-called Arab Spring in 2011 were catalyzing events, showing the potential of nonviolent strategies to both researchers and activists. Researchers have focused on how changes in governments take place, and how dictatorships can be replaced by popularly elected politicians. Criteria for success and failure have usually focused on the movements' own stated goals.¹ The state focus is not surprising, given how central the state is in politics. However, although state power is tightly interlinked with global capitalism and the current neoliberal world order, economic issues seldom receive attention when nonviolent campaigns are discussed or analyzed. For most movement organizers and scholars, the ultimate end goal in anti-regime campaigns seems to be representative

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government interlinked with global capitalism, and this can create hardship and perpetuate disempowerment for large parts of the population.

To explore the potential for radical social change beyond state power and capitalism, the political philosophy of anarchism is a promising place to start because it involves rejection of the state. Thus, in this article we ask: How can the political philosophy of anarchism inform analysis and evaluations of nonviolent anti-regime campaigns?

Historically, some practitioners of nonviolent action, most prominently Gandhi, advocated some form of anarcho-pacifism. However, much has happened in the fields of both nonviolence and anarchism since then. To bring this thinking up to date, we draw on insights from recent understandings of anarchism which are also critical of violence. Our purpose is to explore how anarchism's rejection of the state can inform an understanding of nonviolent anti-regime campaigns that goes beyond taking state power.

Below we give a short overview of developments in the theory and practice of nonviolent action, looking especially at anti-regime campaigning. Following this, we examine anarchism as a political philosophy, identifying four principles of anarchist theory and practice that can shed a different light on both nonviolent struggles and their results. *Non-hierarchy* is the anarchist commitment to abolish all forms of domination, while *self-management* refers to organizing society through voluntary associations. Anarchists advocate *direct action* as the way for people to take responsibility for making change rather than appealing to powerholders. The principle of *prefiguration* is that the methods used should reflect or embody the kind of society being sought. We then illustrate the potential of this approach by using these four principles in an analysis of South Africa's transition to a post-apartheid government in 1994. We picked South Africa because it is often celebrated as a success story for nonviolent regime change. However, South Africa is also the most economically unequal country in the world,² which raises intriguing questions about the relationship between nonviolent regime change and economic justice. The analysis reveals that anarchism is a promising approach for providing a vision and method for challenging systems of domination.

A note on language. Various expressions are used to refer to methods of protest, noncooperation, and intervention that do not involve violence against opponents, including satyagraha, nonviolent action, people power, and civil resistance, each with advantages and disadvantages.³ The word "democracy" is commonly applied to societies with elected governments, but this can make it difficult to talk about systems in which citizens collectively make policy decisions rather than just voting for representatives. Therefore, instead of the more common expression "liberal democracy," we usually refer to "representative government."⁴ The word "revolution" can refer to a change from one political system to another, as in "nonviolent revolution," or, more restrictively, to a combination of both political change and a transformation of social structures, for example the class structure, as in the cases of the French, Russian, and Iranian revolutions.⁵

NONVIOLENT ACTION

Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan's research on anti-regime campaigns, initially published in 2008, has had an enormous impact on nonviolence research.⁶ Their preferred term for nonviolent action is civil resistance. Chenoweth and Stephan initially compiled a database of 323 anti-regime, secession, and anti-occupation campaigns throughout the world between 1900 and 2006. They classified them as violent or primarily nonviolent and as successful, partly successful,

or unsuccessful. Their dramatic conclusion was that nonviolent campaigns were twice as likely to succeed as violent ones.

Prior to Chenoweth and Stephan's work, most scholars had dismissed nonviolence as necessarily less effective than violence, simply assuming that a sufficiently ruthless ruler would always triumph over an unarmed opposition. One of Chenoweth and Stephan's many findings was that nonviolent campaigns were more effective than violent ones independently of the level of repression.

In Chenoweth and Stephan's framework, the case of South Africa which we discuss below is classified as a successful nonviolent regime change.⁷ That the campaign was primarily nonviolent might come as a surprise, given the attention to the ANC's armed struggle in the 1960s and the debate about the relationship between violent and nonviolent tactics within the anti-apartheid struggle.⁸ Among scholars studying civil resistance, South Africa is usually considered a successful case for nonviolent regime change, and some researchers even suggest that the apartheid regime could have ended earlier or with fewer costs if the movement had renounced armed struggle.⁹

The dichotomy between violence and nonviolence which is characteristic of much research in the civil resistance tradition has led some critics to argue that the frequent rioting, sabotage, and other forms of unarmed violence carried out by civilians as part of struggles that are primarily nonviolent have not been given the attention they deserve.¹⁰ Others have discussed what scholars of nonviolence can learn from this criticism and have pointed out how simplifying and glorifying nonviolence risk leading to less accurate analysis.¹¹

Before Chenoweth and Stephan published their study, the nonviolence research field mostly relied on qualitative investigations, especially case studies.¹² Chenoweth and Stephan's work stimulated a huge increase in research interest in civil resistance and inaugurated an emphasis on using quantitative methods.¹³ This research both reflected and reinforced a focus on anti-regime struggles. The so-called Arab spring uprisings that overthrew dictatorships in Tunisia and Egypt and threatened many others coincided with the uptake of Chenoweth and Stephan's research, fostering media and campaigning interest in civil resistance to authoritarian governments. If there is an implicit goal underlying these sorts of campaigns, it seems to be to achieve a responsive electoral political system operating within a capitalist economy. Critics argue that this model is deeply flawed, given the power of large corporations to shape public agendas.¹⁴ However in the most common understandings of nonviolent regime change, such as Chenoweth and Stephan's, the critique of capitalism is generally off the agenda.

To better understand current emphases in nonviolence theory and practice, it is useful to review some of the history of the field. Nonviolent action has been used throughout history, but it was Gandhi who conceptualized it as a method of struggle.¹⁵ In a sense, Gandhi pioneered what is now called strategic nonviolent struggle.¹⁶ Gandhi is most well-known as leading, for several decades, the campaigns that led to the independence of India from British colonial rule. In Chenoweth and Stephan's catalogue, this is counted as a partial success.¹⁷ What is less well-known today is that Gandhi saw the use of what we call nonviolent action or civil resistance, and Gandhi most commonly called satyagraha, in campaigns for independence as only one facet of a wider struggle against several systems of oppression, including the caste system, women's subjugation, and capitalism.

Gandhi can be considered an anti-capitalist, but in a quite different way than the socialists in his day and since. The socialist project has many strands, including anarchism, but they most commonly involve obtaining state power, either through electoral means or revolutionary seizure via a Marxist party, and using state power to dismantle capitalism. Gandhi, in contrast, had a

vision of a federation of self-reliant village democracies, and the path towards this vision included a constructive program, the building of people's capacity for self-rule and economic self-sufficiency through practical projects.¹⁸ An exemplary practice was the spinning of cotton, seen as a way of developing autonomy from British manufacturers while giving people experience in controlling their own lives. Although Gandhi and the campaigns he led had a profound influence on later generations of activists, thinkers, and researchers,¹⁹ the most well-known and influential aspect of his efforts was the independence struggle, whereas village self-reliance mostly dropped off movement agendas.

Gene Sharp was a US academic who was initially a devotee of Gandhi. However, he developed his own approach, a pragmatic approach to nonviolent action.²⁰ Sharp's innovation was to see methods of nonviolent action as tools to oppose war, genocide, dictatorship, and social oppression, without requiring a moral commitment, but instead because they were more effective than violence. Sharp spent years identifying and classifying methods of action such as types of strikes, boycotts, and occupations, culminating in his three-part magnum opus *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*.²¹ Although Sharp documented the extensive use of nonviolent methods by workers, especially strikes and boycotts, he was never a critic of capitalism. Sharp has occasionally been accused of working for the CIA to implement neoliberalism in countries hostile to the US. However, one analyst of Sharp's work argues that he probably was closer to anarchism than to neoliberalism.²² Sharp's work had a great influence on both research on nonviolent action and anti-regime campaigners drawing on his insights.²³ Thus, he epitomizes the dominant perspective on nonviolent action in the past half century, commonly called pragmatic nonviolence,²⁴ which is also evident in the work of Chenoweth and Stephan.

Anarchist ideas have also had some influence in both the writing and practice of nonviolent action, although they are marginalized compared to the pragmatic school of nonviolence. In the next section, we introduce the political philosophy of anarchism and authors who have linked nonviolence and anarchism, with a focus on more recent developments. Subsequently, we show how insights from this research could potentially be important for developing more nuanced evaluations of nonviolent regime change.

ANARCHISM, VIOLENCE, AND NONVIOLENCE

Anarchism is a diverse political philosophy and practice with many different strands. In order to limit this introduction to anarchism, we have chosen to focus on anarchists with a social and collective orientation. They are the ones relevant for developing an anarchist-inspired analysis of nonviolent regime change, and also the large majority.²⁵

Anarchists are united around the belief that people have the capacity to organize themselves in ways that enable personal and collective development and freedom, without rulers or bosses. The classical anarchists, such as Tolstoy, Bakunin, Proudhon, Goldman, and Kropotkin, focused on the state as an oppressive institution, and many analyses of anarchism see its opposition to the state as its distinguishing feature.²⁶ Anarchists in practice have also opposed capitalism, and it is worth noting that contemporary capitalism would collapse without states to protect private property and regulate markets.²⁷ Anarchist movements later expanded their critique to include all forms of domination, including racism, patriarchy, and speciesism. Based on this, we can see that a core feature of anarchism is the ambition to abolish all forms of domination and hierarchy, whether based on class, race, gender, or other categories. In relation to nonviolent regime change, it becomes obvious that anarchism points to the limitations of the reformist goals of

nonviolent political revolutions. To anarchists, it is not enough to replace a dictator with elected rulers as long as state institutions like the military, police, prisons, and security forces remain intact, which they do in nearly all political revolutions.

Since the 1980s, the credibility of state socialism declined with the rise of neoliberalism and then further with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Many movements lost faith in state politics, and in various ways kept a distance from the state.²⁸ This has led to an increased interest in anarchist organizing, which has influenced, for instance, the globalization-critical movement and the Occupy movement.²⁹

In his history of anarchism in the US, Andrew Cornell argues that anarchist ideas had a much larger influence on the struggles and campaigns on the left during the 1960s and 1970s than generally acknowledged. As conscientious objectors, influential anarchists, and war resisters met in camps and prisons during WWII where they learnt from each other.³⁰ From the 1970s, anarchist practices have spread throughout US and other Western social movements, displacing Marxist models.³¹

John Holloway has conceptualized the state-critical turn theoretically with his concept of “anti-power” in the book *Change the World without Taking Power*, drawing in particular on experiences with horizontal organizing that became widespread in Argentina and Mexico.³² One of the most interesting contemporary attempts at creating political, economic, and social autonomy based on direct democracy is the Zapatistas in the South of Mexico since the 1990s. They can be understood as pursuing a bottom-up nonviolent revolution where the goal is to secure autonomy in all areas of life rather than take state power.³³ Since the struggle does not aim for state power, it is not included in Chenoweth and Stephan’s study, although in many ways its goals are more far-reaching than in nonviolent political revolutions. Within the Zapatista movement, the goal is to share power and make decisions at the level where the people most affected can be heard. Their slogan “leading by obeying” turns traditional understandings of what leadership means upside down. Their work is centered around securing basic needs and autonomy for everyone by delinking themselves as much as possible from the Mexican state and global capitalism.³⁴

Several of the classical anarchists, such as Bakunin and Kropotkin, believed that the creation of their ideal anarchist society would require a sudden and abrupt revolution. In contrast, later authors have emphasized gradual change.³⁵ The idea of starting gradually to create change here and now is also the core of the concept of constructive resistance. Inspired by Gandhi’s constructive program and also drawing on the political philosophy of anarchism, Sørensen, Vinthagen, and Johansen argue that an integration of constructive aspects with more direct forms of resistance will increase the chance of radical change.³⁶ They argue that because constructive forms of resistance often are low-key, unlike protests and strikes, alternatives can potentially flourish without being immediately repressed. Much of the Zapatista struggle can be considered to be constructive resistance, as can other initiatives such as worker, producer, and consumer cooperatives.

Anarchism has long had an ambivalent relationship with violence but, since its early days, it has always contained some voices for nonviolence.³⁷ Tolstoy considered himself a Christian anarchist and rejected any use of violence. He was a strong inspiration for Gandhi whose views on self-reliant village life we already described. In the 1800s and early 1900s, some people assassinated political leaders in the name of anarchism and direct action, acts called “propaganda of the deed.” In the 1930s, Spanish anarchists fought a revolutionary war against fascists. However, in the following decades, anarchist-inspired activists increasingly rejected violent methods, influenced by the failure of the Spanish revolution, the experience of World War II, and the example

of Gandhi.³⁸ Within anarchist circles, there remained some support for assassination and armed self-defense,³⁹ but in practice most activists eschewed violence except as a last resort.⁴⁰

According to April Carter, all anarchist principles, for example opposition to authoritarianism and rejection of ends justifying means, are contrary to violence. To explain why pacifists and anarchists had not been as close as they might have been, she offered several reasons: anarchists inherited the image and example of violence from the French and American revolutions; anarchists joined socialists in rejecting pacifists as middle-class supporters of the status quo; and the Spanish civil war claimed anarchist loyalties.⁴¹

Today, relatively few anarchist campaigners defend armed struggle for a better society, though some reject a commitment to nonviolence and support rioting.⁴² Some anarchist writers use rhetoric, with terms like “insurrection” and “violence against violence,” that sound like a call to armed struggle, but frequently this is to be understood symbolically and metaphorically.⁴³ Also in the literature on nonviolent action, several authors have strong anarchist inspirations, although this is not always made explicit.⁴⁴ Stellan Vinthagen’s theory of nonviolent action has obvious anarchist inspirations and draws on Gandhi’s constructive program, for instance in his emphasis on the dimension he calls “utopian enactment.”⁴⁵ In contrast to Chenoweth, Stephan, and Sharp, Vinthagen’s framework for analyzing nonviolent action is multidimensional, but its insights have not found their way into mainstream evaluations of nonviolent regime change.

Explicit anarcho-pacifist positions have also been expressed and explored in relation to various academic disciplines relevant for understanding regime change and the current neoliberal world order. In peace and conflict studies, Joseph Llewellyn has argued that an anarcho-pacifist position is the only logical position for anyone striving for anti-domination and emancipatory peace. Defining anarchism as “the politics of anti-domination,” he writes: “As anarchism rejects domination, it rejects capitalism and the state as a system of domination. Anarcho-pacifism, which I’m advocating for, rejects the use of violence too because it is the absolute form of domination of other human beings”⁴⁶ Using a similar line of argument in his discipline of human geography, Simon Springer has argued for understanding anarchism as an ethical philosophy of nonviolence that rejects war.⁴⁷

Christoyannopoulos discusses areas where anarcho-pacifism provides a critique of the current world order.⁴⁸ Since societies that undergo regime change remain part of this world order, it is worth looking into this critique. First of all, Christoyannopoulos points out how the current world order is based on a fetishizing of violence. Although unarmed movements that topple dictators have chosen nonviolent means in their struggle for change, the successor states to which successful movements give birth maintain what Christoyannopoulos calls “fetishizing of direct violence.” Just as in any other state, this is obvious when it comes to border control, prisons, counterterrorism, and preparations to wage war. Christoyannopoulos also identifies how states slide into what he calls “systemic militarism” and how states enforce various forms of exploitation, including the economic inequality associated with global capitalism.

These studies integrating anarchism and nonviolence or explicitly advocating anarcho-pacifism have had little impact on the mainstream approach to analyzing nonviolent regime change. One reason for this may be that many of them remain rather abstract and philosophical. In contrast, we propose a framework that can be applied when analyzing cases of nonviolent regime change. We have operationalized four important anarchist principles which we introduce in the next section. Subsequently, we apply them to the case of South Africa as an illustration of what anarchist insights can contribute to an analysis of nonviolent regime change.

ANARCHIST INSIGHTS AND NONVIOLENT REGIME CHANGE

We have identified four anarchist principles related to goals and methods that can be operationalized in an analysis of struggles for nonviolent regime change. We call them “principles,” but they might also be called values, ideas, guidelines, features, precepts, or aspects. They are concepts useful for describing and understanding anarchist theory and practice, but we do not suggest that they have some formal status. There are various ways to position anarchism conceptually; we have chosen one that is useful for our purposes.

First of all, as indicated above, anarchists strive for the *abolition of all forms of domination and hierarchy*, whether based on class, gender, race, human chauvinism, or any other categorization. This principle ought to be operationalized relatively easily by investigating to what degree abolition of domination is part of the visions for a regime change campaign, and to what degree hierarchies exist within the campaign or movement itself. Such a criterion is not part of the current evaluations of nonviolent regime change reviewed above.

A second anarchist principle or value is commonly called “self-management.” Contrary to connotations of the prefix “self,” self-management refers to groups of people collectively organizing their own lives. In the workplace, this is called workers’ control or workers’ self-management.⁴⁹ In the political sphere, self-management is more commonly called direct democracy, in contrast to electoral systems in which representatives make decisions. Self-management can be thought of as the practical enactment of anarchist philosophy.

Some anarchists have imagined that communes would be the ideal unit for self-organizing and that these communes would then be organized in confederations. Syndicalists see work as the prime area for organizing, while others simply say that voluntary associations will take multiple different forms and that it is impossible to predict exactly what they will look like in a future anarchist society.⁵⁰ On the other hand, Colin Ward’s often-cited book *Anarchy in Action*, first published in 1973, demonstrates what anarchism means in everyday life in relation to, for instance, city planning, education, and family life.⁵¹

Although self-organizing in voluntary associations is central in almost all forms of anarchism, anarchism also struggles with a permanent dilemma between its commitment to both individual freedom and the need for collective organizing and solidarity with others.⁵² Randall Amster writes about it as “do-it-yourself—together,” demonstrating the relationality of contemporary anarchism and how anarchists recognize “the basic premise that *none* can be free unless *all* are free.”⁵³

In an analysis of campaigns for nonviolent regime change, self-management can be investigated both in relation to goals and methods. To what degree is it a goal that people should be directly involved in making decisions that affect their own lives, and is it possible to identify experiments with and practices of self-management and direct democracy while the struggle is going on?

The third anarchist principle is an emphasis on *direct action*. At first glance, this appears to be related only to methods, as it is a concept that indicates that people have a responsibility to act themselves to stop domination. It is a strong contrast to “indirect action” where one appeals to others, such as politicians, courts, corporations, or regulatory bodies, to change laws, behave responsibly, or fix problems. Recalling the idea of voluntary association, most anarchists believe in taking direct action together, by finding like-minded people to associate with to stop injustice or start building a better and more equal society.

Most campaigns for regime change include many examples of direct action, some of which have caught the attention of media worldwide. The occupation of Tahir Square in Egypt in 2011

when tens of thousands of people lived in a self-organized tent city for weeks is just one example among many. However, in the anarchist tradition, this principle not only relates to methods but also goals, since it illustrates that anarchists would never be satisfied with demanding free and fair elections as they did in Egypt, since that is “indirect politics.” Although indirect politics have led to improvements in many places, anarchists think it is unlikely to change the deeper social structures.

Direct action is closely related to the fourth anarchist principle relevant to our theme, namely *prefiguration*: the ends should be incorporated in or compatible with the means.⁵⁴ Earlier we described how an increasing number of anarchist theorists and movements have turned away from violence. This is frequently because they link direct action to *prefiguration*, which means that one should act to oppose injustice using methods that reflect the desired future society, as in the saying, “There is no road to peace; peace is the road.” With direct action one should act, to the degree possible, as if one is already free.⁵⁵ This is also in line with Gandhi’s argument that the ends never justify the means, and the means used will influence the ends. Thus, if one aspires to a society without direct violence, one should not use direct violence in the attempt to get there.

Another important aspect of prefiguration is stressing how the struggle for change should be rewarding or even fun. Emma Goldman has been quoted as saying, “If I can’t dance, it is not my revolution.” Though apocryphal, this encapsulates an idea that has influenced the thinking of many anarchists. Making a revolution should not be a series of endless, boring meetings; on the way to a better society, there is a need for laughter, fun, and celebration.⁵⁶ Contemporary social movements with anarchist sentiments, such as the globalization-critical movement and Occupy, have become well known for their innovative and creative style and such a carnivalesque atmosphere has temporarily shown how other worlds are possible.⁵⁷

We have identified four anarchist principles that can be operationalized to analyze campaigns for nonviolent regime change. In the next section, we apply them to the South African struggle to end the apartheid regime.

SOUTH AFRICA: ANARCHIST PRINCIPLES AND NONVIOLENT REGIME CHANGE

In the previous section, we identified four principles that can guide anarchists who are skeptical about using violence: opposition to domination, self-management, direct action, and prefiguration. These are not uniquely anarchist since they are important in many other contexts, but they are useful for evaluating anti-regime campaigns from an anarchist perspective.

We now proceed to look more closely at these principles in relation to South Africa’s transition to a post-apartheid society in 1994. We picked this case because it is frequently celebrated as a great success for nonviolent action according to the “usual” criteria for evaluation, yet at the same time, it can highlight how different the situation looks through anarchist eyes. According to a recent report from the World Bank, the richest 10% of the South African population controls 80% of the wealth, and the apartheid legacy plays a big role in the current situation.⁵⁸ Although South Africa has a relatively stable government with respect for civil and political rights,⁵⁹ the capitalist class still dominates economically post-apartheid. Thus, through this case we can illustrate what an anarchist-inspired analysis has to offer when it comes to understanding both the struggle against apartheid and the post-1994 situation.

Apartheid was a racist political system in which the small white minority dominated the majority population of African origin and other people of color. Historically South Africa had small

groups of anarchists active in the labor movement integrating people of all races, sometimes playing a bigger role than what Marxist writers of history have given them credit for.⁶⁰

The central organization in the fight against apartheid was the African National Congress (ANC). Founded in 1912, the ANC was initially inspired by Gandhi and committed to nonviolent action but was definitely not an anarchist organization. At the outset it was mainly for the educated elite but, after apartheid became further institutionalized in 1948, a younger generation started using a more confrontational type of nonviolence, and the ANC mobilized more broadly. The most prominent mass civil disobedience actions were organized during the Defiance campaign in 1952. From the start, the ANC was a democratic organization with an elected leadership, but a traditional hierarchy. It did not practice direct democracy, but we can identify some elements of prefiguration and participatory democracy in the anti-apartheid struggle, both within and outside the ANC.

In contrast to some of the other anti-apartheid organizations, the ANC was prefigurative in being open to all South Africans no matter the color of their skin,⁶¹ a reflection of how they envisioned the future South Africa. After the Defiance Campaign, the ANC, together with the South African Indian Congress, the South African Coloured People's Organisation, and the South African Congress of Democrats, set out to organize an enormous exercise in participatory democracy. In 1955, the Congress of the People, consisting of almost 3000 delegates from organizations all over South Africa, adopted a visionary document called the Freedom Charter.⁶² Organizing the work on the charter, involving hundreds of thousands of people, was a daring undertaking at the height of apartheid repression. In a process facilitated by volunteers who traveled around the country, South Africans were invited to suggest what should be included if they could write the laws. The text of the Charter was adopted at a conference in Kliptown while the police were arresting the delegates. The organizations called for a democratic society where all who live in South Africa, black and white, would have the same rights. It also called for economic justice and land redistribution, stating that "the people shall share in the country's wealth" and that "the land shall be shared among those who work it." In the following decades, the Freedom Charter played an important role in keeping large parts of the anti-apartheid movement committed to the idea that South Africa belongs to everyone who lives there.

In the 1960s, the ANC abandoned its commitment to nonviolence and engaged in sabotage and then later in armed guerrilla warfare, but these methods failed to undermine apartheid; by 1964 almost all ANC leaders were in prison. The ANC was outlawed, and although some anti-apartheid work continued underground, it was not until the student protests and the Soweto uprising in the 1970s that resistance was re-energized. In the 1980s, the anti-apartheid struggle took a new turn that is particularly interesting in relation to self-organizing and direct democracy. Rather than trying to tackle apartheid as a system head-on, the inhabitants in the impoverished townships for colored and black people, often with the encouragement of ANC underground connections, started local associations with a subtler agenda. They focused on local issues concerning living conditions in the townships, for instance sanitation, water, and rent levels. In 1983, at a time when repression was less severe, the United Democratic Front (UDF) was formed to connect all these small local organizations. It was a heterogeneous organization without a constitution, but it clearly had aspirations for a just and egalitarian society that went beyond "one man, one vote" perceptions of liberal democracy.⁶³ A few years later, the term "people power" came to play an important role in the UDF, signifying the importance of direct democracy, organization building, and how people should govern themselves.⁶⁴ Successful boycotts and withholding of rent depended on strong local organizing which in turn required broad-based participatory structures in the townships.⁶⁵ Participatory structures could also include "people's courts," which in

some places (but far from all) were widely respected and appreciated as an alternative to the official judicial system.⁶⁶ In this period, self-organizing in street committees also started to spread, inspired by what was happening in the small town of Cradock. Here a local citizen association had forced the apartheid-backed local council to resign, and in its place, a self-organized association based on street committees for a while governed the township, for instance taking responsibility for sanitation and supervising pension payments.⁶⁷

The ANC has been given much credit for its fight against apartheid and played an important role as a symbol of continued resistance, but the relationship between the ANC and the UDF was complex and varied across different regions. The UDF was formed with the blessing of the ANC, and to many UDF leaders, it was the extended arm of the ANC. As a legal organization, the UDF was able to operate on the ground inside South Africa in the decade leading to the transition. However, the illegality of the ANC made communication difficult and, according to Jeremy Seekings, in practice “the UDF was often the tail that wagged the ANC dog.”⁶⁸ During the years that the UDF dominated the anti-apartheid struggle, people power and participatory democracy played a much more prominent role than before or after. However, the UDF was first and foremost committed to working for representative government and political freedom and did not have an anti-capitalist agenda. Once business owners started to question the apartheid system because it was no longer in their economic interest, the UDF had no problem cooperating with them.⁶⁹

Direct action and prefiguration thus played a role in the struggle against apartheid but, as a nationalist movement, the ANC has always been state-focused and never tried to organize according to anarchist principles. In contrast, the UDF was more bottom-up oriented and the idea of people power dominated for some years. However, when the ANC was legalized in 1991, the UDF disbanded itself and many former UDF activists and leaders took positions in the ANC. As a political party that would soon gain state power, the ANC sought to exert control over people's power on the streets; local governments ended rent boycotts in order to provide services. The belief in people power was converted to a belief in representative government.⁷⁰

Summing up the analysis of the struggle against apartheid in relation to the four anarchist principles, we find traces of them in parts of the struggle, but none ever took center stage. If we turn to South Africa today, some 30 years post-apartheid and the introduction of civil and political rights for all South Africans, things look rather bleak when it comes to overcoming domination and hierarchies. Economic inequality today is still high, and the distribution of wealth reflects that the white population is relatively privileged. Although some black people have also managed to become incredibly rich, race is still the most important factor in explaining inequality of opportunity at birth.⁷¹ The ambitious plans for land redistribution included in the Freedom Charter have not materialized even after decades of ANC rule, and there has been debate about whether the UDF betrayed its visions, with some UDF founders distancing themselves from the ANC.⁷² The current situation is hardly surprising given how fully the ANC embraced neoliberalism as soon as it came to power in 1994 and how completely intertwined with capitalism it has been in its decades as a governing party. According to Helliker and van der Walt, this is the “logical outcome” of the ANC's position as a nationalist and state-centered movement.⁷³

When it comes to the anarchist principles of direct democracy and self-organizing, it is also evident that direct democracy is different from today's representative government; contemporary examples of self-organizing are rare. Despite the failure of the state to fulfill the basic needs of the South African population and experiences with self-organizing in the UDF in the 1980s, no culture of economic self-organizing has developed. However, after the fall of apartheid, a few anarchist-inspired networks and organizations emerged. Although they are tiny numerically,

they have aimed to influence both the student movement and the labor movement. However, these anarchist groups are not directly linked to the anarchists within the labor movement which had an impact between the 1880s and 1920s, and neither are they linked to the anti-apartheid struggle.⁷⁴

Trevor Ngwane has made a detailed study of shack settlements in South Africa, from the 1940s onwards.⁷⁵ His analysis reinforces several of the themes covered above. In most of these settlements, a variety of locally created committees for making decisions and carrying out functions were established. These committees of working-class self-rule worked with, through, and against state structures. Ngwane calls this “democracy on the margins,” and it can be considered to be in the spirit of anarchist politics. The decades of deepening anti-apartheid struggle enabled an alliance between unions and shack-settlement self-management and represented a heightening of grassroots democracy. However, after the end of apartheid, settlement self-management did not increase but rather was constrained by ANC interventions.

Ngwane’s assessment is that the end of apartheid represented a tacit agreement to allow black majority rule while serving the capitalist class. As the ANC became ascendant, the shack committees were subordinated:

The ANC leadership used its authority to control and contain mass struggle and militancy in the townships. ... The idea of people’s power was arguably sacrificed on the altar of class collaboration between the ANC as leader of the national liberation movement and big capital represented by the De Klerk regime. Since then, civic structures have become weak, and remain so in the post-apartheid order.⁷⁶

From this critical perspective, the end of apartheid was a triumph at the elite political level at the expense of disempowering the most oppressed communities.

CONCLUSION

Campaigns against repressive regimes are important features of contemporary politics. That some of these campaigns can succeed with little or no violence by campaigners is highly significant, given evidence that deaths and suffering in such unarmed campaigns are usually far less than in armed struggles. Furthermore, successor governments from successful nonviolent campaigns are more likely to be representative governments than those resulting from armed struggles.⁷⁷ Greater respect for civil and political rights is not enough for anarchists, but we argue that research and activism to improve these campaigns are important for creating freer societies.

Nevertheless, it is possible to question whether the usual endpoint of these campaigns—a representative government—should be the primary goal for efforts because, after such transitions, there continue to be endless obstacles to freedom and justice due to militarism, poverty, exploitation, and integration into the global capitalist economy. Many problems can be and are addressed by social movements, but it is also possible to question the usual goals of anti-regime campaigns as being too limited.

To address this issue, we chose to examine one particular political philosophy, anarchism, and within the wide variety of anarchist perspectives, we selected four principles that are widespread among anarchists and compatible with nonviolent politics. Doing this leads to a different way of looking at both the methods and goals of anti-regime campaigns. One might ask why the political philosophy of anarchism has been so sidelined in evaluations of

nonviolent regime change when there exists a rich literature on anarchism and nonviolence, and anarchism has been shown to have had more influence in movements than usually assumed. One reason might be practical: There is a limit to how much can be included in one analysis, and researchers always have to make choices. Another reason might be a lack of knowledge and understanding about anarchism, confusing this philosophy and practice with chaos and violence. Another explanation for the absence might be that including anarchist insights highlights the shortcomings of representative government and the neoliberal world order. Conventional measures of political freedom, such as those used by Freedom House and the Polity Project,⁷⁸ assume representative government: they are concerned with civil liberties, such as free speech, within systems in which citizens have little direct say in the decisions affecting their lives. Furthermore, conventional measures of freedom give little weight to economic matters, notably economic inequality. In contrast, using ideas from anarchism shows that having a different endpoint and methods to move towards it provides a different basis for evaluating campaigns and their outcomes.

We have shown how selected ideas from anarchism can be used, in conjunction with ideas from nonviolent action, to examine anti-regime campaigns, using the struggle against apartheid in South Africa as a preliminary example. Our analysis indicated that the anti-apartheid movement included few goals and methods relevant to the four anarchist principles. Although the movement had the ambitious goal to end apartheid, its replacement turned out to be conventional. This illustrates what we think is a major problem in many cases of nonviolent regime change: old elites retain or easily regain power. In the case of South Africa, it was the capitalist class; in other cases, it might be military or political elites.

Rather than assuming there is a natural progression, from authoritarianism to liberal systems, that can be pursued incrementally, looking at anarchist alternatives offers a different perspective, with possible implications for anti-regime campaigns. What this means in practice remains to be studied and tested. We have suggested a greater emphasis on constructive resistance as one possibility. This would, for example, influence the preparatory stage in nonviolent campaigns called by Sharp “laying the groundwork,”⁷⁹ by giving more attention to participatory and prefigurative elements in developing social movements. The challenge is to mesh insights from anarchism and nonviolent action to improve the prospects for each of them.

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