

NOTES ON NON-VIOLENT DEFENCE (NVD)

I THE PROBLEM

A campaign for peace should include a positive alternative to war. Calls for neutrality and disarmament are necessary but insufficient. If war or invasion becomes a threat, there will be a resurgence of militarism unless there is a non-military alternative which can confront both psychological and institutional investments in militarism.

A positive alternative to war desirably would be based on mass democratic involvement. Also, it would allow the possibility for non-violent conflict – otherwise 'peace' would be a frozen version of the status quo, a likely possibility under world government.

II NVD

NVD (also called civilian defence) is opposition to invasion or coup d'état by organized non-violent non-co-operation. This non-co-operation includes:

- denial actions (strikes, withdrawals, etc.);
- overt confrontations (sit-ins, etc.); and
- symbolic actions (demonstrations, etc.).

Ideally, methods for NVD would be carefully planned beforehand, and would involve widespread information and training. The methods of NVD work best when carried out with a high degree of community solidarity. This implies organizing the defence around decentralization and a matrix of interactions rather than a hierarchy.

NVD is based on the assumption that power in society is not inherent in leaders or formal positions, but is based on consent and acquiescence of the people. Organized non-co-operation is a threat to even the most repressive regimes.

NVD will be most successful when serving as a sole means of defence rather than in conjunction with violent military methods.

III HISTORICAL EXAMPLES

Although no society has yet instituted a preplanned and coordinated program of NVD, there are several historical cases showing spontaneous use of the methods of NVD. The most often cited are:

- collapse of the Kapp Putsch, Germany, 1920;
- resistance to Nazi occupation, Norway, 1941-45; and
- resistance to Soviet invasion, Czechoslovakia, 1968.

There are quite a number of other suggestive examples and other evidence which suggests that NVD is potentially as effective as violent defence and much *less destructive of life and property*.



Reprinted from 1980 Review of Libertarian Politics and Alternative Lifestyles, Jill Taylor and Bob James (editors), 38 Victoria St, Lewisham, NSW, Australia.

IV PROMOTING NVD

Early peace research (1958-67) on NVD mostly assumed that NVD would be a functional substitute for violent defence, and would be implemented by the government and military after leaders saw the logic of the alternative. Since then, an alternative school of thought has focused on the need to change society in fundamental ways (for example, transforming the military-industrial complex) to provide the social conditions in which NVD can be instituted.

NVD can be one component of a strategy to attain such social change. A demand for NVD is subversive of established institutions since it:

- is an alternative to the militarized society;
- is based on mass participation;
- provides tools to people for resisting oppression and centralized control.

For these reasons, moves towards NVD are likely to be strongly resisted by powerful groups in society such as military, government, and industrial elites.

V A CAMPAIGN BASED AROUND NVD

A campaign for NVD would best be part of a wider struggle for social transformation in the direction of democracy, peace, self-management, etc. Components of such a campaign might include:

- informational efforts;
- research into local conditions and practical problems affecting the introduction of NVD;
- a broad program of NV training and NV action on social issues;
- concrete proposals to community groups, trade unions, government, etc. on measures for switching to NVD; and
- training exercises in NVD methods (within schools, factories, etc.).

Special efforts could be focused on vital groups for NVD such as media workers, key industrial unions, and public servants. The campaign would need to be firmly grounded organizationally to avoid disruption by opponents and to avoid co-option.

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FURTHER READINGS – Other Writings by Dr Martin:
The Bias of Science, Society for Social Responsibility in Science, Canberra, 1979.
Changing the Cogs, Friends of the Earth, 1979.
'Mobilizing Against Nuclear War', *Social Alternatives*, June 1980.
'Soft Energy Hard Politics' *Undercurrents*, no. 27 (1978).