

# Nonviolence Against Hypocrisy: Setting Agendas For Social Defence

In the Gulf, the agenda for the peace movement has been set by George Bush. That is something to worry about. The Gulf crisis has posed difficult questions for supporters of nonviolent action against aggression. How could nonviolent action have been used to stop Saddam Hussein? After all, he has been massacring his opponents for years. The main focus in the Western peace movement seems to have been to support the blockade and oppose the invasion of Iraq. The blockade never was really a nonviolent action since it was backed by force. There have been some important nonviolent actions against war in the Gulf. Perhaps the most courageous is the Gulf Peace Camp, set up by nonviolent activists from a range of countries on the border between Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Yet, it must be said, simply opposing the invasion of Iraq provides no answer to the question of how to use nonviolent action to challenge the occupation of Kuwait. There, as well as supporting such nonviolent interventions, it is also important to look more broadly at the Gulf situation and draw lessons for the future development of social defence. Could nonviolent action have been used to stop Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait? Hardly. Living in a vastly unequal and authoritarian society, the people of Kuwait could not have been expected to provide united nonviolent resistance against an invasion. What then is the role for social defence? An important clue comes from the massive hypocrisies involved in the United States-led coalition against Iraq, in which Saddam Hussein has been portrayed as the epitome of evil.

Western governments proclaim outrage at the invasion and occupation of Kuwait, yet they did nothing about the invasions of Panama and Grenada by United States forces. Nor have they taken much action against the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank by Israel or the invasion and

occupation of East Timor by Indonesia (with 100,000 or more deaths of East Timorese). Western governments were silent when Iraq used chemical weapons against Iranians and against Kurds in Iraq. They eagerly sold weapons to Iraq, in spite of Saddam Hussein's horrible human rights record. Most blatantly of all, they supported the Iraqi invasion of Iran. These hypocrisies have been pointed out often, but one implication for the peace movement has been seldom noticed. The key point is that the agenda for the peace movement has been set by those governments - especially the US government - which have suddenly decreed that Saddam Hussein is the greatest danger in the world. Most of the media have taken their cues from their governments, and popular opinion has thereby been shaped. The result is that supporters of nonviolent action have been put in the situation of having to provide solutions to a crisis created by government and military priorities. The crisis, by its origins and constitution, makes nonviolent intervention extremely difficult. In retrospect, the key time to intervene nonviolently against Saddam Hussein was earlier in his rule, in the 1980s. The powerful 1980s peace movement, though, took little notice even of the Iraq-Iran war, preoccupied as it was with nuclear weapons. Another reason for the neglect of the Iraqi regime's excesses was the support given to it by many governments, including the United States. This support took the form of diplomatic recognition, exports of weapons and other equipment, and turning a blind eye to brutality, the use of chemical weapons, attacks on US warships and so forth.

The agenda in the 1980s for the dominant Western powers was to tolerate or encourage Saddam Hussein. The peace movement as a whole did not challenge this agenda. There were many things that could have been done in the 1980s to



support the nonviolent opposition within Iraq: publicity, boycotts, rallies, communication networks, peace camps and peace brigades, etc. But aside from the regular efforts of groups such as Amnesty International, little was done in this regard. The implication of this analysis is that supporters of social defence need to make much more effort to set the agenda for nonviolent intervention. Rather than putting almost all effort into promoting social defence in one's own country or into intervening elsewhere according to government-dominated agendas, there should be much more energy devoted to developing networks and ongoing campaigns to support nonviolent struggles in other countries according to criteria and priorities set by nonviolent activists. Part of any challenge to repression and aggression in other countries must involve a challenge to Western governments, especially their diplomatic support of brutal regimes and their exports of arms and technologies of repression. This challenge can be called nonviolence against hypocrisy. Such efforts initially may not do a lot to challenge the dominant agenda, but until promoters of social defence do more to set the agenda, they will be continually asked to solve problems at the wrong time and the wrong place. How much better it would be to take the initiative and help to provide solutions to problems that governments prefer to ignore.

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