
Brian Martin, *Social Defence, Social Change*
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Introduction

The idea of social defence—namely of abolishing military forces and relying in their stead on nonviolent struggles by the general population—is extremely radical. Yet a large amount of the writing on this subject is set within the most conservative of assumptions about society. It is assumed that it is somehow possible to introduce social defence and yet leave much of society the same: the same economic system, the same political structures, the same scientific and health systems, and so on.

To me this is implausible. The military is one of the keys to protecting existing systems of power. Remove the military and the scope for change would be greatly increased. Furthermore, training people in methods of nonviolent struggle against outside aggressors would also give them the skills to challenge employers, politicians, sexual exploiters and many others.

Many nonviolent activists are well aware of the connection between nonviolent action and social change. That is exactly why they are responsive to the idea of social defence.

By contrast, though, some of the most prominent writers on social defence—such as Gene Sharp, Adam Roberts and Theodor Ebert—take a position that downplays social change. They focus on defending the state and the existing society. They see social defence as a logical option to be implemented by governments.

My disagreement with these scholars is a friendly one. They have contributed enormously to increasing knowledge about nonviolent struggle and to public awareness of social defence. Indeed, it is

precisely because their contributions are so important that their assumptions should be scrutinised and alternatives considered.

This book is a contribution to that process. I have tried to spell out some of the radical implications and connections that flow from the idea of social defence. Inevitably some of this is speculative. People's experiences with nonviolent struggle are necessary to test and to reject or refine ideas about social defence.

In chapters 2-7, I present the basics of social defence and argue for a grassroots perspective, an offensive orientation and a revolutionary agenda. Chapter 2 gives a basic introduction to social defence; it may be skipped by those who are familiar with the ideas. Chapter 3 argues that it is futile to expect governments to implement social defence. Grassroots action towards social defence is required. In chapter 4, I review Steven Huxley's book on the Finnish constitutional insurgency in order to extract some insights for the development of social defence.

The military coups in Fiji are the focus of chapter 5. I describe the use of nonviolent action against the coups and argue that social defence should not be solely defensive. Nonviolent activists need to be willing to intervene against repression elsewhere. Chapter 7, on "revolutionary social defence," argues that the introduction of social defence may be a snowballing process analogous to the rise of the nation-state.

Chapters 8-14 are short discussions of links between social defence and different social structures or issues: patriarchy, the police, the environment, science policy, and political and economic systems. In each case, I spell out some of the radical implications of social defence for the organisation of society. Rather than being cautious, I've tried to see how far the argument can be taken. Therefore, I don't expect anyone to agree with all my conclusions, which are necessarily tentative. What I think is important is that these issues be discussed and, more importantly, brought into the planning of campaigns and initiatives. Undoubtedly, ideas about social defence will need to be revised in the light of practice.

There are quite a number of topics *not* addressed in this book which warrant treatment, such as industry, health, education, lesbian and gay rights, racism, immigration and nationalism. My intent is not to be comprehensive but to illustrate the far-reaching implications of social defence.

In chapters 8-14, I start with social defence and draw implications for all sorts of areas. Therefore it might seem that I'm putting social defence at the core of a radical programme. This is deceptive. Just the same sort of implications (or similar ones, anyway) could be drawn starting from one of the other areas—on one condition. The starting point must be people having the power to collectively shape their own lives. Social defence does this through organising communities to use nonviolent action against aggression and repression. Other starting points would do the same, such as feminism through empowering women or grassroots democracy through empowering communities. These chapters then are about drawing connections between a grassroots approach to social defence and grassroots approaches to other issues.

An assumption behind my analysis is that campaigns and strategies to introduce social defence should be linked to other campaigns and strategies towards a more egalitarian, participatory society. Social defence should be part of a *process* of social change.