

Communication technology and nonviolent action

In struggles against aggression and repression, communication and legitimacy are key elements. Indeed, communication and legitimacy are central to the method of struggle called nonviolent action. By analyzing the nature of communication in nonviolent action, it is possible to assess the value of different types of communication technology against aggression and repression.

Nonviolent action refers to methods such as strikes, boycotts, rallies, marches, fasts, sit-ins and setting up of alternative institutions. These are all techniques of social action that do not involve causing physical harm to people. Gene Sharp in his classic book *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* lists 198 different types of nonviolent action, with historical examples of each one (Sharp, 1973). Nonviolent action has been used throughout history and, arguably, is much more common than the exercise of violence, but it receives much less attention from historians, the media and the public. Heads of state and military commanders who threaten or use violence to obtain desired goals receive lots of attention. Only a few leading campaigners, such as Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., are known for their advocacy of nonviolence.

It is no surprise that communication is central to many of the methods of nonviolent action. Sharp divides nonviolent actions into three categories: symbolic actions; non-co-operation; and intervention and alternative institutions. Symbolic actions include such things as writing letters, making speeches, distributing leaflets, holding vigils and running teach-ins. They are inherently about communicating both to opponents and supporters. Writing a letter may seem innocuous but, in a dictatorship, can be a potent challenge. The content of the letter is important but so too is the act of writing and openly challenging a ruler. Other symbolic actions, such as the wearing of paper clips by Norwegians during the Nazi occupation to signify their opposition, communicate without words.

Methods of non-co-operation, intervention and alternative institutions also involve a communicative dimension. Working-to-rule, for example, is designed to hamstring an organization even though the workers are ostensibly doing their job, but it also offers a powerful message to the employer or boss, namely that the co-operation of the workers is essential to make things operate smoothly and that the workers have withdrawn that co-operation. In a work-to-rule campaign, workers also communicate with each other, to organize and sustain the campaign and also through their very participation, which demonstrates to others their support for the action and the workers' demands.

Communication is essential to successful nonviolent action. Nonviolent activists must communicate with each other about their goals and methods. They attempt to communicate to the

opponent both directly and through their actions; and they also attempt to communicate with third parties, those not directly involved in the dispute, to win them over or prevent them joining the other side.

To be sure, violent action also relies on communication in all these ways. For example, military commanders must communicate with each other and their troops; governments signal some of their intentions to their opponents via military build-ups; and shows of military strength and terrorism can be used to impress third parties (Schmid and de Graaf, 1982). Nevertheless, there are some key differences between the role of communication in nonviolent and violent action. Killing someone is a denial of further communication with that person, though it may provide a powerful signal to opponents and third parties. By contrast, nonviolent action never closes down communication entirely. More generally, violence is a denial of dialogue. Torture and imprisonment, or just the threat of superior force, reduce the possibility of free and equal speech. Methods of nonviolence are much more likely to open up dialogue, especially when, as is common, nonviolence is used by the less powerful to challenge policies or practices of domination.

The relationship between communication and nonviolence is a large and fundamental issue. Yet within peace studies generally, there is relatively little attention given to communication (Roach, 1993, pp. xvi-xvii), and this relative neglect of communication is replicated within the nonviolence literature. Here, a particular aspect of this relationship is addressed: communication technology and nonviolent action. Technology is seldom discussed in the nonviolence literature, perhaps because most nonviolence researchers are social scientists. In any case, technology plays an important and growing role in many nonviolent struggles.

Conversely, the communication literature seldom addresses nonviolence, and hardly ever in relation to communication technology to serve nonviolent struggle. To motivate the discussion, the next section gives a number of examples of the use of communication technology in nonviolent struggles. Then some theoretical perspectives on nonviolent communication are sketched. This leads to some implications for analyzing the role of different media for nonviolent action.

Case studies

Algeria, 1961. In Algeria, an armed struggle for independence from France was waged from the mid 1950s. It was met by severe repression by French troops. French president Charles de Gaulle, seeing that independence for Algeria was inevitable, began negotiations with the independence movement. French generals in Algeria, bitterly opposed to this course of action, staged a coup on the night of 21-22 April 1961. There was even the possibility that they might invade France.

Opposition to the coup was quickly demonstrated in France. There was a national one-hour strike and massive

rallies. After vacillating a few days, de Gaulle made a passionate plea for troops to refuse to join the rebels. Meanwhile, in Algeria the rebelling generals failed to gain the support of the troops, many of whom were conscripts who heard de Gaulle's broadcast on transistor radios which they had refused to turn in as instructed. Many soldiers just stayed in their barracks. Others reported for duty but purposely failed to do their duty. About one-third of the fighter aircraft were flown out of the country, never to return. The coup collapsed after four days without a shot being fired against it (Roberts, 1975).

Czechoslovakia, 1968. During 1967 and 1968, communist rule in Czechoslovakia was rapidly liberalized, a process supported throughout the country. This was a severe threat to the Soviet government, who organized an invasion of the country in August. Military resistance would have been futile and there was no help from the West. Instead, there was a spontaneous nonviolent resistance to the invasion. People poured out onto the streets. They talked to the invading soldiers and quickly convinced many of them that the Czechoslovak cause was just.

The Czechoslovak military had set up a sophisticated radio network to be used in the event of a NATO invasion. It was used instead by citizens to broadcast messages of resistance, to warn about impending arrests, to counsel the use of non-violent methods, to tell where troops were headed, and to call a meeting of the Czechoslovak communist party. When the Soviets brought in jamming equipment by train, word was passed to the radio network which then called for assistance; railway workers shunted the equipment onto a siding. It took a week before the radio resisters could be shut down. But the Soviets did not obtain their initial objective – setting up a puppet government – until April 1969 (Hutchinson, 1969; Wechsberg, 1969; Windsor and Roberts, 1969).

East Germany, 1989. From 1945, East Germany was ruled by a communist dictatorship. Secret police monitored activity in all spheres of life. However, the government could not control all communications. West German radio and television broadcasts were readily received throughout East Germany, giving an attractive – perhaps unrealistically attractive – picture of life in a capitalist democracy. In 1961, the border with West Germany was walled off to prevent emigration.

Under the Soviet Union's new policies in the late 1980s, there was no longer a guarantee of armed intervention to support client states in Eastern Europe, as had occurred in Czechoslovakia in 1968. On 11 September 1989, Hungary opened its borders with Austria. East Germans, by going 'on holiday' to Hungary, could escape to the west. As word spread, including via news on West German radio and television, the initial trickle of emigration became a torrent. At the same time, there were public rallies against the regime in East German cities. Initially attracting only a few people, in the space of weeks the rallies were attended by hundreds of thousands. News of the growing open dissent was again provided by West German media. In the face of massive emigration and enormous protests, East German leaders resigned. The regime collapsed in the face of nonviolent expression of opposition (Bleiker, 1993).

East Timor, 1991. The former Portuguese colony of East Timor was invaded and occupied by the Indonesian military regime in 1975. There was continued resistance to the occupiers, both nonviolent civilian resistance and an armed guerrilla struggle. Indonesian troops were extremely brutal.

As well as killings of civilians, the search and destroy missions against the guerrillas led to widespread starvation, with the combined effect of killing perhaps a third of East Timor's population. The United Nations condemned and continues to condemn the invasion and occupation, but has never taken any action against it.

Indonesian authorities controlled almost all communication channels. News of resistance and atrocities against the civilian population only reached the outside world via travellers or émigrés. A short-wave transmitter in northern Australia, used to communicate with the East Timorese guerrillas, was shut down by the Australian government.

In November 1991, foreign journalists observed a massacre of hundreds of East Timorese engaged in a nonviolent protest in Dili, the capital of East Timor. One of the journalists, British film-maker Max Stahl, recorded the events on videotape, which was smuggled out of the country. This documentation caused an international scandal. Although there had been many previous massacres which had been witnessed by East Timorese who later left the country, these did not lead to much publicity, partly because of categorical denials by Indonesian authorities. It was the testimony of foreign, independent journalists and of videotape which turned the 1991 Dili massacre into a public relations disaster for the Indonesian occupiers (McMillan, 1992, pp. 163-164, 230-232).

Fiji, 1987. Fiji became independent of Britain in 1970. The Alliance Party, led by Ratu Kamisese Mara, controlled parliament until 1987. In that year, a coalition of the National Federation Party and the newly formed Labour Party won the election. Six weeks later, there was a military coup led by Lieutenant Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka. The coup was justified by the false claim that the rights of the majority Melanesian Fijians were under threat; the real effect of the coup was to check the challenge to the chiefs of Eastern Fiji who had exercised power via the Alliance Party. But by using the rhetoric of ethnic problems, Rabuka was able to justify the coup in the eyes of many Fijians and outsiders.

Censorship of the media within Fiji was imposed. However, since Fiji is composed of many islands, short-wave radio is widely used and, after the coup, provided direct access to foreign news. In the complicated political situation after the coup, the loyalties of the Fijian people, and also of governments and people overseas, were wooed. For example, Australian trade unions banned the loading or unloading of ships going to or from Fiji. The Rabuka regime applied pressure on the Fiji trade union leaders to say that their rights were protected; after a few assurances were provided, the Australian bans were suspended. Meanwhile, Fiji Labour Party leaders tried to mobilize support from other governments, to little avail (Martin, 1993, pp. 5063).

India, 1975. The Indian government led by Indira Gandhi was widely seen as corrupt and unresponsive. A mass movement developed around the popular figure of Jayaprakash Narayan, and this appeared to provide a political threat to the government. On 26 June 1975, Indira Gandhi declared an Emergency. Thousands of people were imprisoned, parliament was muzzled, and the press was censored. For the first few days, the electricity supply to key newspapers was cut off.

Control of information was a key feature of the Emergency. There was enormous resistance to the government, but groups in different parts of the country knew little of each other. Major demonstrations, with up to half a million people, were not reported and hence unknown elsewhere. Some news-

papers capitulated quickly to the censorship requirements, whereas others resisted in various ways. The international press was a key force of opposition; correspondents found innovative ways of getting around censorship. When foreign dignitaries refused to visit India, this hurt the regime; visits by British political figures Margaret Thatcher and Michael Foot were used for propaganda purposes by the regime.

In 1977, Mrs Gandhi called elections, perhaps believing her own government's censorship-created propaganda about her support. In spite of continued though relaxed censorship, the opposition Janata Party was elected. Thus the Emergency came to an end (Henderson, 1977).

Iran, 1978-79. The Shah of Iran began his rule in 1953. His regime seemed invincible. With enormous oil revenues, he created a massive military machine. Secret police terrorized the population through torture and killings. The regime was supported actively by the United States government and was not opposed by the governments of Israel, the Soviet Union or most Arab countries. This apparently overwhelmingly powerful government was brought down by mass nonviolent action, triggered by religious opponents. The speeches of Ayatollah Khomeini, in exile, were circulated on cassette tapes. Funerals, held forty days after deaths, became protests. When police opened fire and killed mourners, further funerals were held. Opponents burned pictures of the Shah in front of spy cameras of the secret police. Tens of thousands of nonviolent demonstrators were shot dead by troops. Eventually sections of the military defected, and the regime quickly collapsed (Albert, 1980; Hoveyda, 1980). It should be said that although the Shah's regime was toppled largely by nonviolent methods, the successor theocratic regime led by Khomeini was also highly repressive.

Poland, 1981. Opposition to the communist regime in Poland developed during the 1970s, culminating in the formation of the trade union Solidarity in 1980. Solidarity's growth was spectacular, and it soon posed a major threat to the regime's power. This process was halted in December 1981 when there was a military coup. During the first few days all electronic communication with the outside world was cut off, while the military leaders consolidated power. Western governments provided little real help to Solidarity in this crisis. Things could have been worse though: it was the visible strength of Solidarity that discouraged Soviet rulers from sending troops to stop the process of democratization.

Anti-regime activists gradually regained some momentum. For example, underground publishing was a major activity. The Polish movement helped lay the basis for the collapse of Eastern European communist governments in 1989. Nevertheless, the 1981 coup was a major setback in this process (Zielonka, 1986).

These brief descriptions cannot do justice to the full dynamics and complexity of the events in each case. Nevertheless, they do illustrate a few important points. First, nonviolent action has, on a number of significant occasions, played a vital role in resisting or challenging aggression and repression. (The examples here are only a small selection from the available evidence.) Second, communication is vital on such occasions. In every case, there is a struggle for legitimacy and communication is a key to success in this struggle. Third, communication technologies often have played a crucial role in this struggle for legitimacy. But before looking more systematically at communication technology in this context, it is worth surveying some theories about the operation of communication in nonviolent action.

Although researchers into communication have developed many sophisticated and insightful perspectives and theories, few of them have been applied to the category of nonviolent action. Indeed, the concept of nonviolent action itself has received relatively little scholarly attention, given the widespread use of methods of nonviolent action. The main aim here is to briefly outline a few perspectives in order to see if there are any obvious implications for assessment of communication technology for nonviolent action.

Communication in nonviolent action

In examining nonviolent action as a tool against aggression and repression, it is necessary to have a theory of power, whether explicit or implicit, and also a conceptualization of the processes of struggle and resistance. Pluralist theories, which conceive of the social world as an arena for competing interest groups, can readily incorporate nonviolent action as a tool of struggle in the social competition. But pluralist theories have difficulty in dealing with systemic oppression, such as found in the Shah's Iran or India under the Emergency.

By contrast, theories of ruling elites, domination and hegemony provide insight into processes of social control, but are of much less value in conceptualizing the processes of struggle and resistance. Both types of approaches, pluralism and domination, thus have strengths but also significant weaknesses for analyzing communication in nonviolent action. Therefore, it seems more fruitful to look first at theories of nonviolent action, with an eye to the role of communication.

The acknowledged pioneer of nonviolent action was Mohandas Gandhi. Gandhi was not a systematic theorist, but rather developed his ideas in conjunction with his campaigns, first in South Africa and then in India. Gandhi's writings and practice provided much of the inspiration for later development of nonviolent action theory and practice (Gregg, 1966; Shridharani, 1939).

Gandhi believed in the power of truth (Gandhi, 1927). He felt that truth could communicate directly to the heart of an oppressor. He called his method of struggle *satyagraha*, which literally means truth-force but can also be translated as meaning nonviolent action. (According to a constructivist perspective, 'truth' is always based on human interests rather than objective reality, and hence is more problematical than Gandhi believed. But for this outline of his ideas, 'truth' is used without quotes.)

It is possible to go so far as to argue that the essence of *satyagraha* is communication: whereas violence, as a form of communication, is a monologue, nonviolence tries to turn a conflict situation into a dialogue (Ramana Murti, 1968). Although this is only one interpretation of *satyagraha*, it highlights the close connection between communication and non-violence. The connection can also be argued directly in terms of a Gandhian theory of nonviolent communication (Bode, 1994).

For Gandhi, truth was not just a linguistic construction. It had to be present in the lives of its advocates, through their humility, compassion, good works and willingness to suffer for the cause of justice. The key issue here is the power of such truth, or truth-in-life, to achieve a better society.

How can such truth be communicated? In his campaigns, Gandhi was always careful to try conventional channels first, such as making polite requests of officials to change their policies which were causing suffering or lack of freedom. If this did not work, he would then, quite openly, initiate a

campaign utilizing nonviolent methods, such as marches, boycotts, or undertaking illegal activities. These methods might be interpreted as a form of coercion, albeit nonviolent coercion. Gandhi, though, conceived nonviolent action as a method of conversion, of 'melting the heart' of the opponent. When the oppressors saw the suffering that was willingly accepted by the nonviolent activists – known as *satyagrahis* – they would recognize the *satyagrahis*' commitment to their cause and be converted to it.

This was Gandhi's theory, but his campaigns did not always work this way in practice. Thomas Weber (1993) analyzed the 1930 'salt *satyagraha*' to see if suffering led to conversion as Gandhi claimed. In this campaign, Indians challenged the British colonial regime's monopoly on salt manufacture by marching to Dharasana to take possession of the salt works there. As they approached the salt works and attempted to enter, they were arrested or beaten. Over a period of days, hundreds of nonviolent activists approached the salt works, and were met by force. The beatings were so bad that hundreds were taken to the hospital, most with serious injuries. Far from softening the hearts of the lathi-wielding police, the brutality became worse. However, the colonial government denied any violence by the police, saying that the protesters were faking their injuries. Weber concludes that direct conversion of opponents was a failure.

Nevertheless, the campaign was a success because of a different process of conversion. Observing the operation was a journalist for the United Press in the US, Webb Miller. His moving reports reached an enormous international audience, challenging and avoiding the disinformation of the official reports. Public opinion in many countries was turned against the British role in India. It was this conversion process that helped achieve India's independence.

Johan Galtung's (1989) idea of a 'great chain of non-violence' is relevant in this connection, as noted by Weber. Galtung argues that nonviolence can work to persuade opponents via intermediaries: a chain of people, each similar enough in social location, who communicate the social concerns. In the case of the salt *satyagraha*, Webb Miller provided a link between the *satyagrahis* and white westerners; in turn, some of the latter had links with British colonial decision-makers.

An interesting connection can be made between Gandhi's idea of *satyagraha* and Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action, in particular his 'ideal speech situation' (Habermas, 1984, 1987). Habermas's ideal speech situation builds on the capacity of all humans to communicate, to enter dialogue and reach intersubjective agreement (rather than individually find truth in nature). In other words, truth for Habermas is obtained through rational discussion in the absence of repression. This theory, though, provides little guidance for communication in situations of unequal power. The confrontation between the *satyagrahis* and the police at Dharasana in 1930 was very far from an ideal speech situation.

However, the relationship between the *satyagrahis* and Webb Miller was closer to an ideal speech situation: neither had significant power over the other. The cultural gap between Miller and his western readers was far less than between the *satyagrahis* and the British colonial rulers. So it might be said that Galtung's great chain of nonviolence operates in practice like a chain of 'reasonable speech situations' which, while certainly not ideal, provide better prospects for the sharing and creating of truths than the two

end points of the chain.

What is it that makes communication of 'truth' so difficult in situations of unequal power? Insight into this crucial question is given by David Kipnis (1976, 1990). Through a series of psychology experiments and observations of real-life situations, Kipnis shows that people who exercise power over others are influenced by the process. The exercise of power tends to make the powerholders believe that those subjected to the power lack autonomy and are consequently less worthy and, hence, can be exploited more than equals. Kipnis's studies provide solid evidence for Lord Acton's insight that 'power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.' The greater the distance between people – whether this is social, cultural or physical distance – the more easy it is for this corruption to occur. The great chain of nonviolence can be interpreted as side-stepping the power inequality that corrupts the powerholders.

Thus, Gandhi's idea that the willing suffering of nonviolent activists can communicate direct to the hearts of oppressors requires considerable modification. Communication of truth works better when there is no power imbalance, and this means that communication via intermediaries is often more effective than direct communication between unequals.

Unequal power systems

So far, the emphasis has been on problems of communication in situations of unequal power. This does not provide much guidance on how to challenge or undermine the underlying problem, the system of unequal power itself. Most theories of power concentrate on explaining types of power – economic, political, social, coercive, etc. – and how they work. Some theorists conceive of power as monolithic; others see power as a set of relationships, as an outcome of 'negotiations,' and so forth. These theories provide insight into existing systems of power, but unfortunately are not linked to any method for challenging oppression.

The researcher who has had the greatest impact on non-violent action in recent decades is Gene Sharp (1970, 1973, 1979, 1980, 1990). As well as documenting and classifying numerous methods of nonviolent action, Sharp has developed a comprehensive picture of the dynamics of nonviolent action, namely the way it works. But the main thing of interest here is Sharp's consent theory of power (Sharp, 1973, pp. 7-62; 1980, pp. 21-67, 309-378). Basically, Sharp argues that rulers have power because subjects consent to it. When consent is withdrawn, as happens through the use of nonviolent action, the power disappears.

One obvious objection is that if subjects do not cooperate, a ruler can simply have them imprisoned or killed. But this still requires consent, namely the consent of the police, the army, or personal guards to carry out the ruler's orders. In turn, the police and army cannot carry out their tasks unless, for example, farmers and shopkeepers supply them with food and factory workers or international traders supply them with weapons. Most social behaviour, most of the time, occurs without the threat or reality of coercion; most systems of domination are built on co-operation or acquiescence by most of the population. This perspective was first proposed in 1548 by Etienne de La Boétie (1942).

There are some severe theoretical problems with the consent theory of power (Martin, 1989; McGuinness 1993). The dichotomy of ruler and subject may work well for explaining authoritarian states, but it is not a good description of complex systems of power such as capitalism, patriarchy, and

bureaucracy. In such systems, most people both exercise power over others and are subject to the power of others, in different domains and circumstances. If, for example, a white female manager in a medium-sized company wants to withdraw consent from oppressors, what exactly does this imply?

In spite of its theoretical limitations, the consent theory of power is a potent conceptual tool for nonviolent activists. Unlike theories of social structure and domination that reify power relations and lead to the 'paralysis of analysis,' consent theory is explicitly voluntaristic. It provides both insights and a theoretical warrant for campaigns involving rallies, boycotts, work-to-rule, sit-ins, and blockades. Furthermore, the limitations of the theory sometimes do not matter so much when it comes to undertaking nonviolent action. Some experienced activists have a deep intuitive grasp of local power structures – those complexities of capitalism and other social structures – and are able to develop campaigns to challenge them effectively (Martin, 1989).

The consent theory of power implies that the struggle for legitimacy is central to social life, including the problems of war, dictatorship, and other systems of oppression. Communication is clearly a central factor in this struggle for legitimacy. Those with more power commonly seek to use communication to justify their power and privileges; those with less power communicate in order to maintain what they have and, sometimes, to challenge the powerholders.

Nonviolent action can be interpreted as a means of seeking legitimacy in which the means – of which dialogical communication is central – are compatible with the end, a society without domination. This is fundamentally different from the logic of violence. According to Jacques Semelin, 'Civilian resistance is above all an *affirmation of legitimacy*, which the language of symbols expresses perfectly and which the force of arms is powerless to destroy' [emphasis in original] (Semelin, 1993, p. 162).

In summary, communication is an absolutely vital aspect of nonviolent action. Only sometimes does it work by reaching directly to the hearts of opponents. Since dialogue works best when differences in power are small, intermediaries are often crucial in communicating between nonviolent activists and oppressors. Nonviolent action works by mobilizing people to withdraw their consent, and this means that challenging the legitimacy of normal patterns of behaviour is central to the success of nonviolent action. The struggle for legitimacy necessarily involves communication and, in many cases, communication technologies. It is now time to apply these insights about nonviolent action to assessing some of these technologies.

Communication technologies

All the above considerations suggest that communication technologies that foster or enable dialogue are more useful for the purposes of nonviolent action than those that inhibit dialogue. If one side in a dispute controls television and radio stations, there is no dialogue. Even if a substantial fraction of the population refuses to listen, the communication imbalance continues. There is little or no opportunity for listeners to present their points of view. It is not surprising, therefore, that dictatorships normally exercise complete control over one-directional electronic communication media. The value of radio and television to oppressors is highlighted by the fact that they are often the first targets in military coups (Finer, 1962; Goodspeed, 1962).

The same considerations apply to communication among

those who resist an oppressor. With a one-directional means of communication, resistance leaders can certainly get their messages to supporters with minimum effort – but these leaders become quite vulnerable to both repression and cooption. Even more importantly, without dialogue, the resistance cannot take into account the views of current and possible supporters, and cannot foster the capacities of others to use skills and take initiatives.

If the only means of communication in a society were interactive, network systems – face-to-face discussion, telephone, short-wave and CB radio, and computer networks – then an aggressor or oppressor would have the greatest difficulty in controlling the population. Network communication technologies do not by themselves eliminate hierarchy and exploitation, but they do aid resistance. The telephone can be used to issue orders, but it is far too labour-intensive for controlling large populations. Also, the subordinate can always talk back.

James C. Scott's idea of public and hidden transcripts is relevant here (Scott, 1990). In situations of domination, such as slavery, aristocrat-peasant relations and landlord-tenant relations, the public record or transcript tells the story of the dominators. There is also a hidden transcript in which the side of the oppressed is revealed. According to Scott, the oppressed are well aware of their oppression: the concept of false consciousness is false. The hidden transcript can be a rehearsal for a challenge to powerholders, a challenge that can develop quickly when the mechanisms holding back resistance are weakened.

In the modern world, mass media are a form of public transcript. The mass media under dictatorships omit the perspective of the oppressed, who therefore must use other media – covert discussions, graffiti, leaflets and clandestine radio, as well as symbolic communication at funerals, concerts and other 'legitimate' events – to share experiences. This also applies to some aspects of life in liberal democracies: for example, police treatment of stigmatized minorities, or oppression and alienation in working life, are seldom portrayed in the mass media. Thus, mass media are useful tools for dominators, whereas network media are useful for developing the voice of the weak.

Galtung's 'great chain of nonviolence' provides another way to explain the advantage of network media for nonviolent resistance. With mass media, the chance of a chain of reasonable speech situations between the oppressed and the oppressors is limited. With network media, the chance is increased, and the denser the interlinkings of the communication network, the greater the ease of dialogical communication.

Several of the examples given earlier support the conclusion that mass media are selectively useful for oppressors. For example, control over the mass media was crucial to government and military control in the shutting down and censoring of the press during the Emergency in India, in the cutting off of electronic communication during the military coup in Poland and throughout the continuing occupation of East Timor. Similarly, control over the mass media was a crucial factor in the Fiji coups and in the Shah's Iran. But in these two cases the opposition had access to alternative sources of information, via short-wave radio in Fiji and cassette tapes in Iran.

On the other hand, some of the cases seem to contradict the idea that mass media are selectively useful for oppressors. Radio broadcasts were vital to nonviolent resistance in the Algerian generals' revolt, the Czechoslovakian resistance to

the Warsaw Pact invasion, and the collapse of the East German communist regime. In each of these cases, a one-directional medium served a nonviolent resistance to repression. What made this possible was a short-term congruence between those who controlled the medium and a dialogue-based mass movement. French conscripts in Algeria, through their own experiences and interactions, were already predisposed to refuse co-operation. De Gaulle's broadcast made them aware that they were supported by the French government and the French people.

In the case of Czechoslovakia, the liberalization of communist rule during 1968 was a mass-based process that challenged the normal control – including control of the media – by those following the Soviet line. The Czechoslovak radio system was temporarily a powerful force for the nonviolent resisters, in a situation where there was a high intensity of face-to-face dialogue, both among the population and between Czechoslovaks and invading soldiers. It is also worth noting that capture of the radio network by the Soviet army decisively ended the active phase of the resistance.

In East Germany in 1989, the Communist Party retained control over the local mass media. West German radio and television provided a window into alternative views, including news of events in East Germany itself, that fed into the protest by East Germans, which itself was based on a commonality of experience.

These cases suggest that one-directional media can sometimes be useful to a nonviolent movement against repression, but only under certain conditions. There must be a strong underlying unity of purpose, itself the outgrowth of common experience and dialogue. Also, the one-directional media are used in a challenging mode, against an even more pervasive or powerful system of persuasion or control.

This conclusion can be summarized by saying that one-directional media are selectively useful for oppression and network media are selectively useful for resistance to oppression. Technologies are not neutral, but nor are they tied to certain uses only. Technologies are stamped by the social groups and goals involved in their creation and application, a process that can be called social shaping (MacKenzie and Wajcman, 1985). But the uses of technologies are not fixed by their creators: users can adapt them to some extent (Mackay and Gillespie, 1992). For example, the US military originally set up the computer network now called Internet which has become one of the most participatory media available.

The fundamental problem with mass media, from the point of view of nonviolent action against repression, is that they place a large degree of power in the hands of a few. This means, as Kipnis' studies show, that it is very easy, though not inevitable, that this power is used to serve the interests of powerholders. The continuing fascination with violence found in the mass media and in the public transcript generally – histories, monuments, celebrations – is compatible with this bias. Dominators are more likely to be served by violence, since they usually are supported by armies and police. Nonviolent action, by contrast, is more democratic: anyone can participate in strikes, boycotts, rallies and sit-ins.

Generally speaking, the greater the opportunity for users to choose and modify the technology, the greater its potential for fostering popular participation (Tehrani, 1990) and the more likely it is to be useful for nonviolent action against repression. Interactive network media can aid nonviolent action most of all when they are generally accessible, easy to

use, difficult for dominators to control, and when they encourage widespread development of appropriate skills. The telephone fulfils most of these requirements. In the future, computer networks may do so, but for the moment they are not generally available and require skills not held by everyone.

Vast amounts of money continue to be spent on development of technology for the military. As well, there is an enormous production and trade in technology for repression, including sophisticated instruments of torture. Nonviolent action, by contrast, receives virtually no support for research and development. Even without direct support, nonviolent activists have been able to achieve some impressive victories – including toppling of repressive governments. They have often made use of communication technology that was developed with military or commercial purposes in mind.

If the situation were reversed, so that funding was entirely for communication technology for nonviolent purposes, repression would not be automatically abolished, but it certainly would be made much easier to challenge. ■

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Towards a world-wide information society

Eliminating the distinction between information rich and poor countries is critical to eliminating economic and other inequalities between North and South, and to improving the quality of life of all humanity. Converging developments in the fields of information and communications offer immense potential to make real progress in this direction. The pace at which the price of communications and information systems has fallen has also undermined the previously rigid link between a nation's wealth and its information richness. There is an unprecedented window of opportunity. But the present reality is that the technology gap between the developed and developing nations is actually widening. Most of the world has no experience of what readily accessible communications can do for society and economy.

Many developing countries face difficulties in raising capital for their existing operators. There is consequently pressure on governments to throw open their doors to international competition. This calls for great care, to avoid jeopardising local services unable to compete with powerful international operators. Perhaps the most creative solution is the establishment of partnerships of operators in developing countries with international companies and consortia. Such mutually beneficial arrangements would bring profitable investment to the Northern partners and strategic skills transfers and expansion of networks to the Southern partners. They will help us all move away from dependency and one-way relationships.

As we head towards the 21st century, the development of a global information society based on justice, freedom and democracy must be one of our highest priorities. To this end I would like formally to table for discussion a set of principles designed to enable the full participation of both the developed countries and the developing countries in building a global information society:

- We should strive towards global universal service in telephony and global access to the information superhighway.
- The expansion of the global information infrastructure should be based on partnership and rules of fair competition and regulation.
- The information revolution should be geared towards enhancing global citizenship and global economic prosperity.
- A diversity of paths towards the achievements of national information societies should be respected.
- The evolution of policy for the development of an equitable global information society should be co-ordinated internationally to ensure the sharing of information and resources.
- The education of young people with regard to the skills needed for living in an information society should be prioritised.

Extracts from a speech given by Nelson Mandela, President of South Africa, at the opening ceremony of Telecom '95, on 3 October 1995, Geneva, Switzerland.

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