

Beyond Military Control

by Schweik Action Wollongong

Nonviolence news report, Germany, 1920;

Troops under the command of the right wing Dr. Wolfgang Kapp attempted to stage a coup d'etat-style overthrow of the new Weimar Republic government in Berlin.

From its hiding place in Stuttgart the ousted Ebert government issued instructions for citizen non-cooperation with the Kappists. Thousands of workers went on strike, newsletters were distributed, shops were shut and the public service shut down.

Under these conditions of general strike the military regime became increasingly weak until, only a short time after the beginning of the coup, its leader fled. The potential effectiveness of nonviolent resistance against military coups was thus shown.

Nonviolence news report, Fiji, 1987;

On 14 May, six weeks after its election to government, the ruling Labor/National Federation coalition of Fiji was toppled by a military coup led by Colonel Rabuka. Since that time nonviolent means of opposition to the regime have been widely used.

Strikes, shop closures, protests, petitions and a mass emigration of learned, skilled workers have proven very effective against the regime. The nonviolent character of such resistance has hurt the violent Rabuka's reputation in the media of Fiji.

The success of such ad hoc measures has led some to conclude that nonviolent action may well have been successful in overturning the regime had it been organised in advance and unified.

Nonviolence news report, Palestine, June 1988;

The deportation of Palestinian nonviolent activist Mubarak Awad this month indicates the importance of nonviolent methods used against Israeli soldiers since the beginning of the intifada in December last year.

After studying the writings of such figures as Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Johan Galtung and Gene Sharp whilst in the USA, Awad returned to Jerusalem in 1985 and founded the Palestinian Centre for the Study of Nonviolence.

When asked about the centre and its role in the organisation of nonviolent action, Awad says that action is organised as the need arises. "People will come and ask for help and we'll go and show them how to organise committees. At first, the Centre was very small with only a dozen or so people attending but this slowly increased. We traveled to many other places and handed out

material on how nonviolence could be used and what forms it could take.”

The initiatives of the Centre have proven successful. Since the uprising in 1987 acts of disobedience have been widely used by people on the West Bank. Many Palestinians now boycott Israeli products, resist tax, refuse to fill out official documents in Hebrew, dismantle fences set up by Israelis and lay in front of Israeli bulldozers. Organised commercial strikes are also a regular occurrence. In 1987 the Centre began planting olive trees on Palestinian land; the olive tree has now become a symbol for the Palestinians.

Awad states that the idea of nonviolence has resulted in a profound change in the thinking of many Palestinians. “For the first time a Palestinian woman will tell her son to go to the streets rather than trying to protect him. This is courage. Then she will go to the streets after him. The man who owns the shop, he cannot do nothing, so he has to close the shop. ...It is an experience of empowerment that is growing and growing. I am seeing that there is much hope.”

The problem of the military

Military forces are a key means of social control in today's world. Military force is the ultimate method any government has for controlling opponents of the state. Troops are used in civil emergencies, such as terrorist attacks, major strikes and insurrection. The military generally acts in a conservative fashion: it does not oppose activities supporting state or corporate power, but it does get involved against mass opposition.

The military coup is a special use of military power, usually to oppose radical change. Military coups are common in Third World countries, but also have occurred in industrialised countries such as Greece and Poland. The possibility of a coup often looms in the background, and provides an unstated inhibition against social movements taking direct action.

The standard response to these problems is to advocate better control *of* the military. The usual formulas stress control by civilian authorities and taking action against individual members of the military who abuse their position. The most common areas of peace movement activity, such as negotiations, disarmament and transferring spending, do not challenge the power of the military in any fundamental way, nor offer any way to overcome the use of military force against reforming governments.

Instead of controlling the military, another way to get beyond military control is to *replace* the military. There are basically two possible replacements which involve popular participation: guerrilla warfare and social defence. Of these two, the possibility of a resurgence of the military is larger with guerrilla warfare. In many anti-colonial struggles, guerrilla warfare has been superseded by regular military forces, as in Vietnam. We believe the best prospects for truly getting beyond military control lie with social defence.

Social defence is a nonviolent alternative to military defence. It is based on widespread political, economic and social non-cooperation in order to oppose military aggression or political repression. It uses methods such as boycotts, refusals to obey, strikes, demonstrations and setting up alternative government.

Social defence is based on the principle that no regime — whether a democracy or military dictatorship — can survive without the passive support or nonresistance of a large fraction of the population. Since social defence relies on resistance by large sections of the population, it is the nonviolent equivalent of guerrilla warfare.

However, the similarities between social defence and guerrilla warfare are limited since the basic thrust of social defence is the replacement of the centralised military system that we know today. Guerrilla warfare must also ultimately rely on the use or threat of violence to achieve its aims.

Social defence has even greater potential than guerrilla warfare to mobilise the population for political struggle. Anyone can participate in social defence, including young, old, women and people with disabilities. Guerrilla struggles, like conventional military forces, rely mainly on young fit men. In addition, use of only nonviolent methods is more effective in undermining the will of the aggressors.

Social defence and other campaigns

Preparation for social defence provides valuable preparation for other campaigns too. Imagine a local community that has developed skills and plans to resist an invasion or coup. This would involve workers being prepared to take over workplaces and produce goods that the community needs. It would involve people joining in workshops and roleplays in how to maintain nonviolent solidarity in the face of attacks on protesters. It would involve developing communications networks outside the standard channels of radio, television and the press. It would involve increasing local self-reliance in energy production, transport and food, for example through greater use of solar heating and wind power, bicycles, and local vegetable gardens.

In each case, preparation for social defence can support other campaigns. If governments or employers take repressive stands against workers, the workers are better prepared to resist by direct action at work. For example, in the case of anti-union legislation, methods of nonviolent sabotage could serve as an alternative form of resistance which would be hard to counter using the legislation.

If a government passed legislation limiting civil liberties or if police abused their powers, resisters would be better prepared. A community ready to use a range of nonviolent methods would be better able to resist repressive government actions or the introduction of computer identification systems. Personal and group practice in nonviolent methods would also help women resist, individually and collectively, violent men.

Alternative communication channels are important whenever the mainstream channels refuse to touch an issue. This includes short-wave radio, CB radio, small-scale printing and photocopying operations, and telephone and newsletter networks. For example, full information about the Indonesian military invasion of East Timor and the Fiji military coup was denied to the Australian population due to censorship and communication bans in East Timor and Fiji, as well as by cautious stands taken by the Australian government and media. Alternative channels, prepared in advance,

would allow Australians to help resist repression in other countries.

Preparation for local self-reliance in energy, transport and food is vital for environmental campaigns. Nonviolent intervention has been widely used against nuclear power plants, forestry operations and industrial polluters.

These examples show that a full-scale conversion to social defence is far more than a change in technique for resistance to invasion. Society would not look the same under social defence. Hence it is only to be expected that social defence can only be brought about as part of a wider struggle for people's control and resistance to control by governments and other powerful groups. Promotion of social defence goes hand in hand with many grassroots struggles by workers, women, environmentalists and others.

The strong links between social defence and other social movements are especially important since the decline of the 1980s peace movement. Two inherent weaknesses of the mainstream peace movement have been its heavy focus on nuclear weapons and its orientation to governments as the road to disarmament. The result has been that campaigns have not changed the power of people in their everyday lives in relation to war. Governments still make the decisions about military matters, and militaries themselves still hold the monopoly over the use of force. The peace movement has certainly had an impact and has helped to shift policies. But it has done little to alter the structures of power which ultimately lay the basis for war.

Social defence overcomes these two weaknesses of the mainstream peace movement. It focusses not on weapons systems but on developing a complete alternative to weapons of violence in the hands of professional soldiers. Furthermore, it does not have to rely on governments for implementation. In fact, governments are likely to be hostile to social defence precisely because it provides power to people which can be used to resist government itself. The onus is on activists to promote social defence in the face of indifference or hostility from governments.

The transition

A future vision for the development of a social defence policy requires a discussion on the transition from reliance on military defence to social defence. This might include

- * supplementing military defence with social defence;
- * utilising social defence in place of military defence in special circumstances, for example when military defence has failed;
- * converting military defence "permanently and completely" to social defence.

Gene Sharp states that social defence is far more achievable than might be thought. Although social defence will require major changes in our societal structures, it will not require deep changes in individuals themselves. Many people are already questioning current military policy. Many more people recognise the desirability of nonviolent defence methods, if not the possibility of their implementation as a complete defence policy.

For many years there has been much debate in the western world on the issue of defence, particularly in relation to the peace movement and in terms of the prevailing economic

circumstances. There is much questioning of the efficiency of military defence in the face of possible methods of current warfare including chemical, biological and nuclear war. Along with concern regarding the monetary cost of weapons production, there is much disquiet about the ever-present potential for offensive use of supposedly defensive weapons. Also in Australia, there is doubt about the possibility of a military invasion from an external source. There seems to be far more likelihood of internal strife than external invasion in the foreseeable future.

Social defence can be a solution to the many questions that have been raised in these debates. The nonviolent methods utilised in a social defence strategy provide no pretext for an arms buildup by opponents. They can also be used against internal as well as external threats. As a comprehensive strategy, social defence abolishes the need for military systems. Gene Sharp argues that social defence "possesses a power potential even greater than military means."

Social defence is theoretically achievable through the normal democratic processes of our society. If enough individuals adopt social defence as a worthwhile goal (individually, nationally and globally), then community pressure can be applied to bring about the necessary policy changes. Once adopted as policy by an organisation such as a trade union or political party, the implementation of social defence could include the organisation of a sponsored and funded social defence network. This network could include small groups on a locality basis to develop and distribute a range of educational material. These groups could also run practical training exercises in the community. These small groups could link into a national or international body, representative of the locality groups. This body could deal with the administration of the social defence policy including the initial transition from military to social defence.

Australia is in a particularly favourable position to experiment with a social defence strategy. Australia enjoys a reasonable level of social cohesiveness and a geographical situation that greatly reduces the likelihood of invasion. If Australia adopted a social defence strategy it could be an important example for other countries to follow. An international linking of social defence strategies is vital for the goal of worldwide security through worldwide social defence. Such links would allow countries to assist each other in the implementation of social defence policies and would facilitate effective pressure being applied on governments and regimes hostile to social defence.

It is when people understand the power that they and their institutions can wield that social defence becomes possible. Self-determination requires the full participation of people in the governing of their communities. Social defence takes place through people's ability to take direct control of the agencies in society.

Social defence contributes to the empowerment of people to be their own experts and the decision makers in their own government. Such self defence exercised by all individuals in society can work toward improved conditions of social justice. It can help create full equality of opportunity and conditions for all people. It can prevent the reliance on violence to gain improved living conditions or to protect one's own living conditions.

A number of social movements are seeking to empower people to take control of their own lives. To the extent that they are successful, society will become and seem more worth defending.

The potential effectiveness of social defence can only increase as this occurs.

What you can do

There are many practical things which people can do to build social defence networks in their communities and workplaces. The essence of social defence is planning and strong grassroots action. So the best way of preparing for social defence is to form links within your community to first build an awareness of social defence through discussions, workshops and speakers.

There are many practical actions that you and your friends can take.

¥ Organise a project on social defence in your workplace which might show ways in which your daily work routines could aid social defence at the appropriate time. This involves looking at the extent to which you as a worker can take control of your workplace.

¥ Approach your local school and see if you can make presentations on the issue to classes.

¥ Learn to use equipment for producing leaflets, such as word processors and printing presses.

¥ Learn to use short-wave radio.

¥ Make an inventory of neighbourhood resources, including food, shelter, communications, transport and people's skills.

¥ Try to go without centralised transport and entertainment for a week. Instead of catching the bus or driving to work, ride a bike or walk. Instead of watching TV, read or make your own entertainment. Write about your experience and send it to friends.

¥ Undertake nonviolent action training.

¥ Participate in campaigns which build skills and experiences in community resistance such as against rape, military installations or government surveillance.

Sources

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Schweik Action Wollongong takes its name from the clever anti-hero of Hasek's classic novel *The Good Soldier Schweik*, who caused havoc in the Austrian army during World War One by pretending to be extremely stupid. The group promotes social defence and other uses of nonviolent action for a more just society. This paper is by Alison Rawling, Lisa Schofield, Terry Darling and Brian Martin. We can be contacted at 40 Euroka Street, West Wollongong NSW 2500, phone (042) 287860, email b.martin@uow.edu.au.