

*Nonviolence not first
for export*

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TO OVERTHROW SUCH ENEMIES OF MANKIND as illiteracy, poverty, ill-health, economic disparity, and political injustice is certainly to conduct a revolution of vast proportions. Today this basic revolution is required in widespread areas of the world. In addition, in many parts of the world, traditional 'revolutions' in which one government is overthrown and replaced by another are desperately needed. It is difficult always to be precise in the use of the term 'revolution'. I have done my best, but I would ask the reader to remember that *two* different meanings of revolution will, of necessity, be used in this brief essay.

As a pacifist who recognizes that rapid and revolutionary political and social change is imperative today, both in America and Europe and in the Third World, I naturally bring with me a deep concern about the use of violence in waging the struggle. I deplore the fact that the western world has pushed the non-western world into a corner where millions of oppressed people see only violence as being capable of wresting freedom and justice from the ruthless and vicious thralldom under which they suffer. Although in some countries it may appear that it is their own rather than the western despots who hold them in subjugation, in many cases it is western financial undergirding and western military assistance that make possible the continuance of this 'indigenous despotism'. However that may be, in the situation in which they find themselves only violent revolution seems plausible, possible, and likely to succeed, according to the judgement of the people who themselves are caught in the actual situation. To them violence, and violence alone, would appear to work effectively and to be capable of toppling the tyranny which oppresses them.

Nonviolent versus violent methods

At this point it should be emphasized that by nonviolent methods is meant far more than simply working for the enactment of progressive legislation, bringing grievances to a negotiating table, and similar approaches. Although these are commendable, I am thinking of nonviolent action in quite assertive and militant terms, including such overt efforts (when strategy demands them) as obstructing access to buildings, disrupting traffic, and blocking the shipment of goods. Such types of action were encouraged by Gandhi in India and Martin Luther King in America. Not only massive protests and demonstrations, but actions involving civil disobedience, the defiance of unjust laws, and the disruption of the regular functioning of the status quo, are included in what I mean by nonviolent methods to secure rapid change. What advantages, if any, then do such aggressive nonviolent methods, entered into with a commitment *not* to injure the antagonist, have over the violence to which most people are committed because of its 'effectiveness'?

For one thing, the disciplined nonviolent revolutionary is less prone to be the victim of his own violent emotions, since part of his discipline has been directed towards the achievement of self-control. The employer of violence is not unaffected by the turbulence of his means. He may be rendered ill-equipped by his violence to carry out the constructive aspects of revolution.

One of the most insidious results of participation in the use of violence is that, no matter how noble their motives, how great their courage, and how deep the sacrifices they make, violence does produce a change in those who employ it. Like it or not, the practitioners of violence emerge from the struggle altered in certain respects. Difficult though it may be to gain this self-perception, people always seem able to perceive quite clearly in the behaviour of another group that violence does brutalize its users, who then carry aspects of this brutalization with them to whatever tasks they engage in, even to the building of the new nation ushered in by the successful revolution. The insight of Jesus, that 'men do not gather figs from thorns, nor grapes from thistles', has relevance here. The brutality, the killing, the hatred, the desire for revenge, and the distortion of values that inevitably accompany violent revolution are apt to undermine the constructive goals of the revolution. Freedom may be achieved, one brand of oppression may be defeated, but in many cases the best that is achieved is a reversal of roles, with new victims subservient to new tyrants, and a new oppression replacing the old.

There is a profound feeling among many in the world today that the United States is a malevolent influence aiding and abetting hurt

and havoc in the lives of multitudes of people around the world. These critics are also convinced that only physically forceful methods can ever release millions, both in the United States and elsewhere, from America's greed and ruthlessness. Is there not, however, insufficient recognition of the fact that the very methods being advocated to unseat American power are in themselves brutalizing and dehumanizing? The victories attained by these methods could move the victors towards the building of a society that in many ways incorporates the very oppression and injustice they so hate and despise.

Milton Mayer has frequently reminded us over the years (reiterating the truth that 'Satan cannot cast out Satan' and that water is in fact a better element to use in fighting fire than fire itself) that 'the Devil is a travelling man'. So often when hatred, distortion, torture, murder, destruction are used to bring down a ruthless and inhuman tyranny that avowedly needs bringing down, it is discovered that the terror and ruthlessness of the old tyranny reappear in a new guise. All too frequently, in human experience, wars of liberation have been fought with lofty courage and high idealism only to result tragically and ironically in the rebirth of tyranny with new tyrants in charge.

The revolutionary goal is a human society where the worth of the individual will be recognized and each person treated with respect. In practical ways concern will be expressed for his well-being and provision made for his creative development. In such a society there will be freedom for people to express their beliefs openly and honestly, freedom of worship, and an absolute minimum of violence used, even in the enforcement of law. There will be freedom from want and hunger and poverty. Land reform measures will be enacted where necessary, giving farmers the land they need to cultivate for themselves and their families. Workers will be free to organize for the advancement of their interests, and the development of cooperative businesses and communities will be encouraged. Education will be provided for every member of the society; illiteracy will be eliminated. There will be employment for all. Discrimination because of race, colour, or creed will end. Universal medical care will be provided; disease greatly decreased; malnutrition brought to an end. People will enjoy freedom to organize politically as they wished and free elections will be a part of the social and political fabric.

This brief picture of the responsible society is obviously neither novel nor profound. The reader should ask himself whether such goals are apt to be reached by violent revolutions that in the very process of being waged alienate one portion of the community from another and leave a trail of hatred and embitterment in their wake. I doubt it. Crippling antagonisms and virulent hatreds would be a part of the legacy of violent struggle, and the physical devastation

wrought would make the rehabilitation of the country and its physical and economic development just that much more difficult.

The advantages of nonviolent change

The advantages of nonviolent change loom very large for me against the background of man's ancient and bitter experience with violence to produce political, economic and social change. In the United States we engaged in violent warfare to bring an end to slavery and to suppress secession of the southern states. A number of knowledgeable Americans argue today that had it not been for the bloody internal holocaust, we would now be closer to the goals of democracy in this country; the Black American would be far freer today and would enjoy many more advantages, had his freedom from slavery been achieved by nonviolent methods instead of being corrupted and vitiated by the vicibus aftermath of a revenge-producing carnage.

Assuming for the moment that these contentions are true, the baffling question still remains: How can oppressed peoples be persuaded that they could better achieve revolutionary goals and fundamental social change by eschewing violence in their struggle? The long, grievous history of human experience offers few examples of revolutionary change achieved by nonviolence. The independence struggle in India under Gandhi's leadership, civil rights progress in America under Martin Luther King's leadership, and the successful freedom effort in Zambia under Kenneth Kaunda are most notable in our time, to which we might add concessions and steps forward won by the labour movement without much recourse to lethal violence.

It may be argued that man does not have forever to repeat the past. In the scientific realm he is constantly breaking with the past and moving on to ever more thrilling and 'impossible' achievements, not only on this earth, but now even in outer space. Why must he therefore be so 'earth-bound' when it comes to the vastly more important matter of how we relate to one another? Cannot we read in the ledger of human experience that for centuries there have been betrayals of revolutionary idealism because of the violence and bloodshed used in attempting to achieve them? Cannot we envisage the tremendous advantages that would be ours if we sought, *not* to permit an unjust status quo to remain dominant over the lives of millions of people, *but* to shake that status quo to its very roots, and finally to dismantle it by methods that would respect the lives and worth even of oppressors and their cohorts?

Gandhi has said that nonviolence is twice blessed, blessing the victims as well as the victors. When the struggle is carried on violently by both sides, both the victim and the victors are demeaned. Nonviolence, on the other hand, appeals to and brings out the best in both. Vio-

lence, we may conclude, brutalizes the revolutionaries and postpones the best in the revolution. Nonviolence ennoble the revolutionaries and enhances the best in the revolution.

In many corners of the world millions of people share the same dream—the building of a humane and egalitarian society. Cannot we move far closer than ever before to the achievement of that goal by being ourselves humane as we struggle towards it, by refusing to employ violence to achieve it?

A double mandate

Those of us in America who seek to respond creatively to the horrendous realities of our day should be driven by a double mandate. First, we must recognize the urgency of finding creative alternatives to violence, lest either our world destroy itself, or internal revolt reduce our own cities to shambles. Secondly, we must enter fully into the dilemma of the oppressed, seeking to understand their understanding of their situation.

An overwhelming assumption held by most people in the world is that ruthless oppressors will forever go on killing and torturing all who offer nonviolent resistance to the oppression. Therefore, in their judgement nonviolent resistance is so ineffective that it is, in fact, tantamount to *no* resistance—and no resistance is in turn, of course, *surrender* and abandonment of hope for bettering their condition. Most people are convinced that a nonviolent struggle is bound to be suicidal. They are certain that their enemy or oppressor 'understands no language but the language of force', by which they mean physical force. People are often quite ready to believe in the efficacy of nonviolent methods for others, convinced that nonviolence would prove effective in a deep and desperate struggle between two other parties in which they are in no way involved. If, however, the suggestion is made to them that the same sort of nonviolence which they advocate for others might be fruitfully practised against their own oppressors, they make haste to point out with deep conviction that 'the . . . (supply the name of any relevant enemy) are different'.

Certainly we must acknowledge significant differences in opponents. The present South African regime, for example, may be far more brutal and impervious to human appeal than were the British in India. In Zambia from 1965 to 1967, I was privileged to spend a great deal of time with members of African nationalist organizations from countries south of the Zambezi River. On the basis of that experience it can be emphatically stated that *the Africans are convinced that nonviolent resistance will not prove effective in Southern Africa against the forces with which they must contend*. Although people from South Africa, South West Africa and Rhodesia had used nonviolent methods repeatedly

over a long period of time in the past, their experience had persuaded them that these methods were not effective against the enemies they faced. The Defiance Campaigns in South Africa were supported by tens of thousands of people; they were well organized, and produced some tangible results, but the shooting down of defenceless people at Sharpeville¹ on 21 March 1960 brought an end to that chapter of their struggle, not only in South Africa, but in the whole southern part of the continent. Sharpeville convinced the Africans that the forces they confront will not yield to campaigns of nonviolent resistance. Most Africans today regard the white regimes in Southern Africa as so inhuman and impervious to appeal as to be different in kind from the British who ruled India.

Nor is this evaluation of the ruthless nature of the status quo held only by those fighting for their freedom in Southern Africa. Essentially the same view is held by many in Latin America and Asia, as well as in the black ghettos of America. The dispossessed people of the world believe, as most people have always believed, that only armed violence can gain both liberation from oppression and freedom from hunger and want. And they are ready to pay the dreadful price which such armed violence exacts, while at the same time refusing to pay a comparable price to employ nonviolent measures, for the very practical reason that non-violence, they believe, will prove ineffective. Brave men and courageous patriots have fought and died in many corners of the world for high ideals, to break the yoke of tyranny and to smash the mailed fist of the oppressor. Tyrannies have been unseated and oppressive regimes smashed by violent methods, while the disintegration and disarray of nations have at times been prevented. We must remember our own violent American Revolution and the even more violent Civil War. It is not surprising that millions throughout the world are convinced that violence is essential in order to achieve rapid social, political and economic change.

A dose of our own medicine

To us in the West this should be understandable. A thoughtful look at the ruthless expansion of western nations across the world during the past five centuries has, in fact, reinforced the views held by the oppressed millions of the Third World.

Any sensitive recollection of the imperialistic rise of the western nations during the past five centuries compels us to see the central role played by violence in their assumption of power over the people of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. This has been apparent not only in the military structures of control, but in the political, economic and cultural forms of coercion and domination. At the heart of western hegemony has been its ultimate power to overwhelm with physical force

the colonized people who have thus been pushed against the wall by the keepers of repressive law and oppressive order. They have seen no recourse other than to take up the same arms which were used to exploit them. They have been taught by the West that force and violence are the ultimate arbiters of human destiny, and reluctantly they have been moved to action based on those suppositions.

Violence has become most apparent when the dispossessed have demanded the right to control their own land and destiny. In response to such insistent demands, every weapon in the western arsenal, from subversion and napalm to the threat of atomic destruction, has been used to maintain the unjust and oppressive power of the ruling forces. We can now see that violence permeates the status quo as, for example, in South Africa: (1) in the suffering created by lack of decent living standards, resulting in poverty, malnutrition, starvation; and (2) in the brutal practices and behaviour of the police and penal system and the injustice of the courts and legal system. The U.S. has allied itself economically with the violence of this status quo, and we ourselves are a part of it.

It should surprise no one, therefore, that Third World forces have turned to counter-violence as a means of winning their freedom. Nelson Mandela of South Africa said in 1965: 'At the beginning of June 1961, after a long and anxious assessment of the South African situation, I and some colleagues came to the conclusion that as violence in this country was inevitable, it would be unrealistic and wrong for the African leaders to continue preaching peace and nonviolence at a time when the government met our peaceful demands with force. The conclusion was not easily arrived at. It was only when all else had failed, when all channels of peaceful protest had been barred to us, that the decision was made to embark on violent forms of political struggle, and to form *Umkonto we Sizwe*. We did so not because we desired such a course, but solely because the government had left us with no other choice.'

Thus out of the agony of their experience, and sometimes with profound regret, the oppressed in Southern Africa and in other countries have concluded that only violence can free them from the galling yoke of their oppressors.

Clearly we cannot prescribe for people in a situation totally different from our own, no matter how sincerely we may believe that we can see a better way for waging a revolutionary struggle than the one they have chosen. From their point of view they are faced with an implacable enemy who will not end his oppression until forced to do so. Although we may be deeply convinced that nonviolence would in the long run prove even more effective than violence (and violence will require *the long run* also; let everyone be quite clear about that) we can-

not offer prescriptions for others. Not only must they come to their own conclusions, but unquestionably they will.

We must realize how limited their options appear to them to be; indeed, how limited they actually are in the light of the conditions which have been brought about by the West. We must accept the fact that dispossessed people may perceive no other way to turn than to the path of armed revolution if they are determined to overcome the cruelty and indignity of grinding oppression.

Even as eminent a Gandhian as Jayaprakash Narayan of India does not feel it appropriate to urge nonviolence upon African freedom fighters. At a luncheon at Quaker House in New York City on 4 April 1968, he met with a group, which included United Nations delegates, to discuss 'Nonviolence in the Developing World'. In the question period he was asked by the First Secretary of the U.N. Delegation from Upper Volta whether he felt, in the face of the continuous experience with white ruthlessness and cruelty in Southern Africa, that the Africans should use nonviolent methods in their liberation struggle. Jayaprakash Narayan in his reply made it clear (1) that he and the Gandhians in India wholeheartedly supported the national liberation movements in Southern Africa, (2) that he wished they would be nonviolent, but (3) that it was entirely up to them how they were to conduct their struggle; neither he nor the Gandhians would take it upon themselves to admonish the Africans to be nonviolent. If a person with the credentials of Jayaprakash Narayan feels unable to urge nonviolence upon the African freedom fighters, how much less fitting it is for white westerners, an integral part of the very white status quo against which the Africans are rebelling, to argue for a nonviolent liberation movement! Just how arrogant and how presumptuous can white western pacifists be?

Every revolution, of course, contains both violent and nonviolent qualities, unless a struggle is led by a Gandhi and pursues a strictly nonviolent pattern. I would suggest to the pacifist eager to outline the program for another's revolution: 'Go live for some years under the point of the plow in a country where over the years you can identify with the oppressed peoples and become fully conversant with all that operates there. Become aware of how vicious and total the tyranny is in the perception of those who actually suffer it day by day. Then, out of your experience of identification with the oppressed, you might in time be able to develop nonviolent methods and even a nonviolent strategy that could be viable in that situation, if not to the extent of making the revolution a gandhian one, at least to the extent of introducing a number of nonviolent qualities and emphases into the pattern of the struggle. Only in this way can your advocacy of nonviolence speak with sufficient authority to lend credence to your words.'

Certainly pacifist advice will carry very little weight when given from several thousand miles away, especially if it has been devised (however sincerely and carefully) in the pleasant, aloof atmosphere of an affluent society starkly in contrast with the misery and repression in which the revolutionary movement is forced to operate. The revolutionary might well say to those from afar who would urge him to wage nonviolent revolution, 'Nonviolence begins at home; why not use your methods on your own domestic problems?'

The place where white Americans must work

I spoke earlier of the urgency of finding creative alternatives to violence. Those alternatives must moreover relate to the groups controlling the weapons and the institutions of repressive violence, notably, the white western nations, and, chiefly, the United States. The necessity to be nonviolent must be urged with passion, and persuasion, *not* upon the oppressed revolutionaries, but upon those who oppress them, and upon the accomplices of the oppressors.

Often overlooked and simply taken for granted, frequently described as the 'community of law and order', is the violence of the status quo in America, the violence of many generations that still exists in massive fashion today. This violence is expressed in the agony of millions of men, women and children who in varying degrees suffer hunger, poverty, ill-health, lack of education, non-acceptance by their fellowmen. It is compounded of slights and insults, of rampant injustice, of exploitation, of police brutality, of a thousand indignities from dawn to dusk and through the night.

We hear so much in today's world about 'terrorism'. Repeatedly it is used to signify violent action on the part of oppressed peoples in Asia, Africa, Latin America, or within the black ghettos of America, as they take up the weapons of violence in a desperate effort to wrest for themselves the freedom and justice denied them by the systems that presently control their lives. What is so easily (one suspects, often deliberately) overlooked is the fact that the very regimes rebelled against are the incarnation of a greater violence and terrorism than any used in the struggle against them. Long before the first freedbm fighter laid hold upon a gun or club, long before the first brick was thrown in Watts or Newark, racist societies were already guilty of a ruthless reign of terror where freedom was suppressed and human dignity denied.

While two wrongs never make a right, before we deplore terrorism it is essential for us to recognize fully and clearly whose 'terrorism' came first, so that we can assess what is cause and what is effect. It is easy to recognize the violence of the revolutionary when he strikes out against the inequities and cruelties of the established order. What millions of middle-class people and other non-poor fail to recognize is that they

are themselves accomplices each day in meting out inhuman, all-pervading violence upon their fellows. To be realistic, we must attack the violence of the status quo in which we all share, no matter how unwillingly. The removal of injustice must be the thrust of our main effort, not the urging of nonviolence upon those who challenge and work to end the inequitable status quo whose privileges most white Americans currently enjoy.

This then must be our emphasis today. Creative alternatives to violence have to be found, and they must begin with those groups who control the weapons and institutions of repressive violence. Since there is no country in the world which can equal America in the possession and control of such weapons, our search for alternatives must begin at home. Many leaders of the Third World consider the United States to be the world leader of counter-revolution and violent repression. As one person put it recently, 'In much of the world the United States is an outlaw nation'. So an honest concern for such matters must lead us to speak to the uses of American violence and the threats of its use in Newark, at Kent State, in Indochina, in the Indian Ocean, and in Guatemala. Any search for alternatives must begin with a new look at the institutions which create and perpetuate the violence of our status quo. Alternatives for violence need to be found for the strong far more than the weak; the strong can destroy the world.

Conclusion

This realization brings me to the conclusion that it is impossible for us to be 'gandhian' in the revolutionary situation in the developing world, that is, in the way in which that word has been traditionally understood. The gandhian approach has thus far been practised by the oppressed. The underdogs have attempted to emphasize the enormity of the injustices they suffer and ultimately to appeal to the minds and consciences of their oppressors. During the past quarter century white pacifists in the West have constantly urged this approach upon oppressed peoples and, where such leaders as Martin Luther King have arisen, have been able to identify with their movements, and to participate in and give support to their efforts. When the oppressed, however, reject nonviolence, there is no way for middle-class whites to be 'gandhian' in the traditional sense.

In this situation, instead of attempting to identify with the oppressed, we must recognize that we are included among the oppressors. We are called upon to influence and persuade the oppressors until a change of mind and attitude and behaviour is wrought in them, that is, in *our* group of people. Henceforth, we will no longer be inclined to spend time urging nonviolence upon the oppressed. Instead we must urge a basic, radical change upon the status quo of which we are a part.

To put it simply: We believe in nonviolence and in revolution and therefore in the possibility of nonviolent revolution. We understand that the oppressed do not share our faith in nonviolence. We have given them little reason to. Still we identify with the justice of their cause, and we urge all who are able in good conscience to do so to unite with them and support them in their revolution.

Meanwhile, we will work with nonviolent means to achieve a revolution in the American status quo, striving to bring about radical changes in attitude and radical shifts from the practice of exploitation to the pursuit of justice. We are prepared to make the necessary sacrifices in income and to run the risks attendant upon the reordering of our society in order to achieve social justice and the right of self-determination for all people everywhere.

This seems to us the most realistic action we can take in the interests of *both* nonviolence *and* justice. It will make it easier for the disadvantaged to succeed in their revolutionary struggle if we can remove both direct American domination and/or American support for their oppressors, and this, in turn, will serve to minimize the violence which they feel compelled to use to reach their goals.

Instead of trying to devise nonviolent strategy and tactics for revolutionaries in other lands, we will bend every effort to defuse militarism in our own land and to secure the withdrawal of American economic investment in oppressive regimes in other parts of the world. For example, instead of trying to urge nonviolence upon the Guatemalan guerrillas, we will endeavour to keep the U.S. Marines at home, and U.S. military and economic support from being sent to buttress and undergird the repressive Guatemalan government. This would allow the Guatemalan revolutionaries to use nonviolent methods, if they so determined, without having to contend with the present awesome might of American military and economic intervention.

Revolution then is needed first and foremost in the United States, thoroughgoing revolution, not a mild palliative. Specific and far-reaching changes are needed in American foreign policy, with equally specific and thoroughgoing changes in the U.S. domestic scene. Rather than engage in the arrogant endeavour of urging Guatemalans and Zimbabweans to become Gandhians, we urge revolutionary change upon Americans.

If the moral imperative of our situation does not appeal to Americans, then there is a very mundane and practical reason for total and speedy revolution. Bluntly stated it is: Revolutionary change is needed to save our own skins. Otherwise we will suffer an ever-increasing isolation in the world, as our allies and erstwhile friendly nations one after another desert us. Gunnar Myrdal has warned us that not one European nation would dare to send a single squad of soldiers

to Vietnam, lest that government be overthrown by an angry populace. The growing anger and turmoil within our own borders needs scarcely to be underlined; already we in many ways are a nation split in two, and the possibility of civil war is not simply a nightmare of extremists. Not just a realization of our common humanity with suffering people around the globe, not just a genuine compassion for their misery and distress should move us towards revolutionary change; a realistic, down-to-earth self-interest also argues for drastic change within the United States today.

I believe in nonviolent revolution but I also believe that it is neither humane nor practical to urge nonviolent revolution upon others whose situation is so totally different from our own. It is up to the Latin Americans and the Africans to decide how they will wage their struggle for freedom. We cannot decide for them. Certainly we dare not judge the morality of their choice.

As a believer in nonviolence it is within the United States that I can and must work. It will be extraordinarily difficult to achieve results here, but it is here that I am called upon to labour in order to make the most realistic contribution I can to the struggle for freedom and justice throughout the world.

1. During the freedom struggle in India, in the infamous Amritsar massacre, British troops fired into an unarmed crowd that was trapped in a spot where no one could escape and killed approximately 380 people (three times the number killed at Sharpeville), and wounded many more. From the carnage in India, Gandhi *did not*, however, draw the conclusion that nonviolence had failed. And in time his judgement was vindicated. In time there came to be a limit to the violence the British could justify to themselves—or felt they could justify to the world. And India won its independence as the result of a nonviolent campaign.

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