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NONVIOLENT ACTION. A general technique of sociopolitical action applied by people and institutions through the use of symbolic protest, noncooperation, and nonviolent intervention, nonviolent action may be called "nonviolent struggle" or "nonviolent sanctions." Since the 1986 struggle against the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines, this technique is frequently called "people power."

Role of Power. Nonviolent action is an application of a very simple truth: people do not always do what they are told to do, and sometimes they do that which has been forbidden. This technique is thus rooted more in human stubbornness than in a belief in turning the other cheek. When people refuse their cooperation, withhold their help, and persist in their disobedience and defiance, they are denying their opponents the basic human assistance and cooperation which any government or hierarchical system requires. If they do this collectively through their established independent social institutions or newly improvised groupings for a sufficient period of time, the power of that government or hierarchical system will weaken and potentially dissolve. The basic political principle underlying nonviolent action is that hierarchical systems and all governments, including dictatorship, are able to function only to the degree that they receive the submission and cooperation of the people and institutions within them—whether that assistance is freely given or induced by fear.

A Technique of Conflict. Nonviolent action is a way to conduct conflict. It is a response to the problem of how to act effectively in politics, especially how to wield power. In this technique, however, people and institutions apply societal pressures other than physical violence. Nonviolent action may involve: (1) acts of omission—that is, people may refuse to perform acts which they usually perform, are expected by custom to perform, or are required by law to perform; (2) acts of commission—that is, people may perform acts which they do not usually perform, are not expected by custom to perform, or are forbidden to perform; or (3) a combination of acts of omission and commission.

Methods of Struggle. Three broad classes of methods are included in the technique. (1) Where the nonviolent group uses largely symbolic actions intended to help persuade the opponents or someone else, or to express the group's disapproval and dissent, the behavior may be called nonviolent protest and persuasion. Marches, parades, and vigils are among the methods of this class. (2) Where the nonviolent group acts largely by withdrawal or the withholding of assistance, submission, and cooperation, its behavior may be described as noncooperation. This class contains three subclasses: social noncooperation (such as social boycotts or ostracism), economic noncooperation (including many types of economic boycotts and labor strikes), and political noncooperation (among them noncooperation with government units, civil disobedience, mutiny, and severance of diplomatic relations). (3) Where the nonviolent group acts largely by direct intervention, its acts may be referred to as nonviolent intervention (disrupting usual routines psychologically, socially, economically, politically, or physically). The methods in this class include sit-ins, hunger strikes, nonviolent obstruction, nonviolent invasion, and parallel government. Some of the more visible manifestations of people power, such as blocking tanks, fall into this class.

Often in this technique people use their usual roles in the social system as means of direct resistance. This occurs, for example, when factory workers refuse to continue working because of a grievance, or when judges refuse to enforce the illegitimate orders of putschists. The impact of noncooperation will be influenced by the type or extent of the group's usual participation in the normal functioning of the system. The application of noncooperation by key groups and the use of multiple methods of nonviolent struggle have the potential to slow, halt, paralyze, or even disintegrate the institution or political system against which it is employed.

Such defiance will not be welcomed by the opponents, and they may apply extreme violent repression in attempts to force a resumption of passive submission and cooperation. That will not necessarily succeed, however. Nonviolent struggle has been demonstrated to be capable of operating successfully under such harsh repressive conditions. Indeed, at times the use of extreme violence against disciplined nonviolent struggle may contribute to the success of the resisting population. Through a process of "political jujitsu," violent repression sometimes drives more people to join in the resistance, alienates some usual supporters of the opponents sufficiently that they, too, protest and resist, and causes third parties to oppose the opponent group and support the nonviolent struggle group.

Mechanisms of Change. The nonviolent technique has its own requirements for effectiveness. These include sound strategy, wisely chosen tactics and methods, persistent

action despite repression, and nonviolent discipline. Physical violence, or the threat of it, is excluded in nonviolent action, for it disrupts the general dynamics of this type of conflict. The technique possesses special mechanisms of change which must be implemented if a given struggle is to succeed. When successful, nonviolent action achieves results through one of four broad mechanisms of change or some combination of them. (1) In conversion, the opponents come around to a new point of view in which they positively accept the nonviolent actionists' aims. (2) In accommodation, the opponents choose to compromise and grant some of the resisters' objectives, adjusting to the new situation produced by the conflict but without changing their viewpoint. (3) Where nonviolent coercion operates, change is achieved against the opponents' will and without their agreement because they have lost control. Nevertheless, the opponents still retain their institutional positions and hold to their original opinions. However, the sources of their power have been so undercut by the nonviolent means that they no longer are able to deny the objectives of the nonviolent actionists. (4) Finally, in disintegration, the opponents' sources of power are so completely removed that the whole system or government simply falls apart. This occurred, for example, with the communist regimes in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) and Czechoslovakia in 1989.

"War without Violence." Nonviolent action is so different from milder peaceful responses to conflicts (such as conciliation, arbitration, and negotiation) that several writers have pointed to certain similarities of nonviolent action to military warfare. Nonviolent action is also a means of combat. It, too, involves the matching of forces and the waging of "battles," requires wise strategy and tactics, and demands of its "soldiers" courage, discipline, and sacrifice. The degree of bravery required, however, is no greater than that required by military means, and the casualty rates in nonviolent struggles repeatedly appear to be very much lower than those in comparable violent conflicts.

The Choice of Nonviolent Struggle. Nonviolent action has been overwhelmingly applied by groups that would have been willing to use violence in other circumstances. In most cases the choice to employ the nonviolent means has been made out of pragmatic considerations. These include assessments of the resisters' objectives and resources, the nature of the conflict, and the strengths and weaknesses of the opponents. Such action has seemed to be the obvious way to pursue certain objectives. In many cases nonviolent struggle has been consciously chosen because optional violent forms of action were seen in advance to be ineffective or unrealistic, or because violence had already been used and failed. Nonviolent struggle has sometimes been practiced widely even when the rhetoric of resistance has been "armed struggle"—as was the case in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s with the widespread use of school boycotts, rent strikes, and demonstrative funerals. A similar situation occurred in some European antifascist resistance movements during World War II that used such forms as strikes, civil disobedience, and symbolic protests, although they supported the Allied military efforts.

Much more rarely, nonviolent means have been chosen over violence for religious or ethical reasons, or at times because of a mixture of normative and practical motives. In some cases, even when pragmatic political considerations were dominant in the choice of nonviolent struggle, the movement has taken on certain religious or ethical overtones. This was the case in the campaigns of the Indian National Congress for independence from Britain in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. Those struggles, often under Gandhi's leadership, and also the civil rights campaigns in the 1950s and 1960s in the Deep South of the United States, under the leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr., and others, are very important, but they are not historically typical. In most cases, elements of religious or ethical nonviolence are much weaker or absent, and charismatic leaders are not present.

Scholarly Study and Preconceptions. Nonviolent action has in recent decades been subjected to the beginnings of research and analysis by social scientists. As a result, it is now clear that some common assumptions about this technique and various preconceptions about its requirements and limitations are not valid. As late as the 1960s, for example, it was sometimes assumed that nonviolent struggle in politics had been an innovation made by Gandhi. It is now clear, however, that nonviolent struggle his been widely practiced through: out history in all parts of the world.

The belief that nonviolent action usually requires much more time to produce success than does violence is not accurate. As with violence, the length of nonviolent struggles varies widely. In some cases, success has even come within days or weeks, as in the nonviolent revolutions against the military dictatorships of El Salvador and Guatemala in 1944 or in the noncooperation and defiance of the August 1991 coup in the Soviet Union.

Contrary to the view that nonviolent action can occur or succeed only under democracies, much nonviolent struggle has been practiced, sometimes successfully, against oppressive systems and extreme dictatorships. For example, nonviolent resistance was used with varying degrees of effectiveness during the Nazi occupations of

Norway, Denmark, and the Netherlands. Nonviolent struggle even at times played a significant role in saving Jews from the Holocaust, as in Berlin, Bulgaria, and Denmark. In communist-ruled Eastern European countries, nonviolent struggle was widely practiced, beginning in 1953 in East Germany, then in both Poland and Hungary in 1956. Czech and Slovak resistance to the 1968 Soviet-led invasion was a powerful case of improvised nonviolent struggle used for national defense which held off the Soviet objective of a hard-line regime for eight months. The successful ten-year struggle of Solidarity in Poland (1980-1990) exemplified the ability of people to carry on nonviolent resistance under the harsh conditions of martial law. In 1989-1990 nonviolent struggle contributed significantly to the collapse of communist rule throughout Eastern and Central Europe.

Surprisingly, the preconception that this technique can operate only when both parties share common ethical norms such as the Judeo-Christian heritage, still surfaces from time to time. Much contrary evidence exists, however. Nonviolent struggle has been widely practiced in diverse cultures of the world, including its use by Muslims, atheists, Hindus, Buddhists, Marxists, and people of other persuasions. Scholarship on nonviolent struggle has also clearly separated the technique of nonviolent action from belief systems espousing ethical or religious "principled nonviolence" or "pacifism"—of which there are various types. Some groups of believers in "nonviolence" still view the nonviolent technique and moral or religious belief systems as necessarily closely tied. Some such believers even reject nonviolent action. Belief systems espousing ethical and religious nonviolence are clearly distinct phenomena from nonviolent action. Although nonviolent action is usually extraconstitutional (that is, it does not rely upon established institutional procedures of the state), it is possible to incorporate the technique into constitutional government at various points, and even to use it to defend an established government against attack.

Civilian-Based Defense. Since 1964, serious explorations have been made into the potential of a refined, developed, and prepared use of the nonviolent technique for national defense, against both internal coups d'etat and foreign aggression. This policy is usually now called "civilian-based defense." It aims to block domestic usurpers or foreign aggressors from establishing illegitimate rule over the attacked society.

Opinions differ among policy makers and strategists of this policy as to its proper role in a country's defense preparations. Increasingly, the disagreements are not about whether civilian-based resistance options have a role, but rather about what role that should be, and how large a role they are capable of playing. In 1986, the Swedish Parliament unanimously added such a "nonmilitary resistance" component to its overwhelmingly military "total defense" policy. Switzerland and Austria have similar components, officially at least. In 1991 the writings about civilian-based defense influenced the Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian defenses against attempted coups aimed to depose the independence-minded governments of those countries.

Increased Knowledge and Practice. Knowledge about the nature, requirements, and strategic principles of the nonviolent technique is increasing and spreading at the same time that the practice and visibility of nonviolent action are expanding. This technique is now widely recognized as a potentially powerful alternative to violence for groups engaged in acute conflicts. The development of research and policy studies on this technique itself marks a significant new stage in the historical development of the technique.