

Chapter Twenty-nine

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR NONVIOLENT ACTION

Confronting the power of the opponents

Nonviolent resisters use their power against the power of their opponents. The technique of nonviolent action controls and wields power by using psychological, social, economic, and political methods.

Frequently, the opponents are either a government or a group that has the support of the State's courts, police, prisons, and military forces. Groups using nonviolent struggle wisely refuse to confront their opponents with violent weapons, with which their opponents have overwhelming advantage. Instead, in strategic terms, the nonviolent struggle group counters the opponents' violent power *indirectly* in ways that operate to the resisters' advantage. An asymmetrical conflict ensues, with the two sides fighting by contrasting means.

Nonviolent struggle operates to weaken the opponents by alienating the institutions and groups that supply the sources of the opponents' power, frustrating the effective utilization of the

opponents' forces, and at times weakening their will to use their available capacities. The reduction or removal of the sources of the opponents' power is an attempt to reduce or destroy their capacity to continue the struggle.

Social sources of power changes

The power of both the nonviolent struggle group and the opponents is variable. The variations in the respective power of the contending groups in this type of conflict situation are likely to be more extreme, to occur more quickly, and to have more diverse consequences than do the power variations in a conflict when both sides are using violence. Furthermore, the nonviolent struggle group may, by its actions and behavior, help to increase or decrease the relative power of the *opponent group*.

The first source of the variations in the power of each side is that the strength of the leaders of both the resistance and the opponents depends on the degree and quality of the support and participation the leaders receive from their own group or from the bureaucracy and agencies of repression that they control. Bureaucrats and agents of repression of the opponent group are more likely to reduce their efficiency and to increase their noncooperation with their own officials when the resisters use nonviolent means instead of violent action.

The second source of variations in the power of the two groups is the degree to which the general population gives sympathy and support to the nonviolent resisters or instead to the opponents and their policies and actions. Increased support for the resisters is more probable if the movement is nonviolent than if it is violent.

The third source of these variations in the power of the two sides is the opinion and practical support of the national and international communities. Public opinion and external support can help to strengthen or weaken either group, but this impact very clearly cannot be relied upon as the major force for achieving change.

Risks and variations in nonviolent action

As with all types of conflict, nonviolent struggle involves risks. One is the risk of defeat. Use of this technique is no guarantee of success. Other risks include insecurity and danger for the resisters. Repression is a likely response when the resistance seriously challenges the established order. In nonviolent struggles resisters can be injured, suffer economic losses, be imprisoned, and even be killed. Historically, however, these risks are significantly reduced in nonviolent struggles, as compared with struggles in which both sides use violence. In explosive situations, there is also a risk of the eruption of violence by frustrated people, which could seriously damage the nonviolent struggle movement. Furthermore, extreme dictatorships may deliberately act harshly against innocent people in order to frighten others into compulsive submission. The Chinese saying is “Kill the chicken in order to frighten the monkey.” However, to do nothing in a situation of oppression is to invite not only continued violence by the opponents, but also by the dominated group.

The variety of the characteristics of nonviolent struggle movements is enormous, as the previous cases illustrate. No two cases are alike. To facilitate the analysis of the dynamics of nonviolent action in this and later chapters, however, certain assumptions are made here:

- That methods from all three classes of protest and persuasion, noncooperation, and intervention are used, but especially noncooperation.
- That large numbers of people are participating, mostly acting under nonviolent discipline for the duration of the struggle.
- That the opponent group is either the existing regime or has the backing of the State.
- That some civil liberties are present, although they may be sharply reduced during the conflict.

Leadership in nonviolent struggle

We also assume here the existence of a leadership group of the resisters that directs the action. This is not always the case. Even

when such a leadership group is present, it will not necessarily be well informed about this technique. These leaders need to become experts on nonviolent struggle. Knowledge about nonviolent struggle also needs to be spread widely. Greater knowledge and understanding of the nonviolent technique throughout the population will increase the difficulty for the opponents to “behead” the movement by imprisoning or killing the leaders. Leaders serve as spokespeople and offer, organize, and can implement solutions to problems. Leadership can be by group, committee, individual, or a combination of these. In some cases, it has been difficult to identify leadership in such movements.

Casting off fear

A prerequisite of nonviolent struggle is to cast off or to control fear of acting independently and of the potential sufferings. This is for several reasons:

- Cowardice and nonviolent struggle do not mix. The coward seeks to avoid the conflict and flees from danger, while the nonviolent resister faces the conflict and risks the dangers involved.
- Fear arises from the assumption of one’s weakness. Nonviolent resisters, however, ought to have confidence in their cause, principles, and their means of action.
- Casting off fear, or controlling it, depends on gaining confidence in one’s power to act effectively to produce changes. Fear can be removed in stages. Participation in struggle helps.
- Proposed resistance action should be proportionate to the bravery of the participants, not more dangerous than they can bear. Frightened activists can only engage in weak actions.
- To end brutalities more rapidly, it is helpful to demonstrate that the severe repression is not achieving the opponents’ objective of halting resistance.
- In short, bravery in this technique of struggle is not only moral valor, but a practical requirement.

Preparations for nonviolent struggle

In all campaigns, careful planning and preparations are essential. When possible, the following types of preparations should be considered in order to maximize the possibility of success.

Investigation

Advance investigation will include several elements. First, determine the causes of the conflict, list the grievances, formulate desired changes, give widest possible publicity to causes, facts, and goals, and generate “cause-consciousness”—awareness of the grievances and justification for the coming conflict.

Second, investigate the opponents, including their objectives, beliefs, background, strengths, weaknesses, supporting institutions, sources of power, decision-making processes, allies, and vulnerabilities. Other elements are discussed in Chapter Thirty-six.

Plan the strategy for a possible struggle

Assuming negotiations are initiated (as discussed below), extremely careful strategic planning for the possible future conflict should be completed before such talks begin. Without wise strategic planning and other types of preparations, it is premature to engage in serious negotiations with the opponents. Strength to back claims and demands are required for the opponents to take the resisters seriously.

In many ways, the political principles of nonviolent struggle are very simple. However, the actual workings of this technique are far more complex than the simple operation of the specific methods used. The highest degree of success is not likely to be achieved by chance or simple tenacity. In many conflicts, the operation of nonviolent struggle can be more complex than that of conventional military warfare. If this complexity is understood by the nonviolent resisters and their leaders, they have the opportunity to increase the effectiveness of their struggle beyond what it would be if they only understood the most basic characteristics of this technique.

In general, if one wishes to accomplish something, the chances of achieving that goal will be greatest if one uses one's available

resources and leverage to maximum effectiveness. In nonviolent struggle that means having a strategic plan that is designed to move from the present—in which the goal is not achieved—to the future—in which it is achieved.

We will discuss the importance of strategic planning further in Chapter Thirty-five and discuss elements of strategic planning in Chapters Thirty-six and Thirty-seven. With a greater understanding of the dynamics of nonviolent action and examination of the conflict situation, it will be more possible to develop a competent strategy for a particular conflict. The identification of steps to use in the preparation of wise strategies is a new phenomenon, which is discussed in detail in Part Four.

Sharpen the focus for attack

The success of the campaign depends on finding the correct point of attack. It is not wise to try to achieve several major objectives at the same time. The nonviolent leadership will be wise to concentrate action on the weakest points in the opponents' case, policy, or system. The issues must be precise and capable of being clearly understood and recognized as justified. The struggle in a major conflict will usually benefit from formulation of concrete stages in the resistance. Success may depend on phasing the long-term strategy to score a series of minor gains that will eventually lead to a single major victory.

Concentrated strength on a clearly justified specific aspect of the general problem increases the resisters' ability to achieve their larger objectives. One should seek to control the link that guarantees the possession of the whole chain. Repression against nonviolent resisters concentrating on such a point of attack may operate to strengthen the resisters' cause.

Generate "cause-consciousness"

At an early stage, it is important to publicize the facts, issues, and arguments advanced by the nonviolent struggle group through pamphlets, leaflets, books, articles, papers, radio, television, public meetings, songs, slogans, audio- and videocassettes, and in other ways, as may be possible. Quality in these efforts is

important. Hatred or intolerance should not be aroused. It is also important not to antagonize potential allies.

Arousing “cause-consciousness” may be divided into several phases. These include activities intended to

- Develop understanding of the issues in the conflict.
- Inform the population of the contemplated action, the requirements for its success, and the importance of engaging or not engaging in particular acts.
- Justify resort to direct action.
- Warn of the hardship and suffering that will be incurred during the struggle.
- Arouse confidence that the likely repression will be worth incurring because nonviolent struggle is more likely than any other type of action to correct the grievances.
- Bolster confidence that in the long run the combination of a just cause and use of this technique will ensure victory.

Quantity and quality in nonviolent action

Careful consideration must constantly be given to the relationship between the number of persons participating in the conflict and the quality of their participation. The best balance between numbers and quality will vary with the situation. Certainly, when employing a technique of action that greatly depends for its effectiveness on the withdrawal of consent, cooperation, and obedience, the number of participants is important in determining the impact of the action.

In general, however, quality is more important than quantity. Lowered standards to obtain large numbers can be counterproductive and can lead to a weaker movement. High standards of nonviolent behavior are required for a movement strong in both quality and quantity. The genuineness of the strength of the resistance is related to such factors as fearlessness, discipline, and tenacity despite repression, and also to wisdom in the choice of strategy, tactics, and methods of action.

Organize the movement

Sometimes an existing organization—or several organizations—may conduct the nonviolent struggle. At other times, creation of a new organization may be required. The organization should be efficient, honest, able to operate with voluntary discipline, and have effective internal communication. It should also have planned in advance how to communicate with its own supporters, in case the opponents break or block lines of communication.

The organizational efforts should focus on

- **The public:** publicizing the facts and grievances; promoting sympathy; disseminating solid information about the nature and requirements of nonviolent struggle.
- **The volunteers:** recruiting; training and incorporating participants into the movement; promoting commitment.
- **The leadership:** preparing replacements for arrested leaders of the movement; setting the procedures for further selection of leadership; supplying information to the leaders.
- **The movement in general:** supporting morale and discipline; preparing participants to act without leaders in times of severe repression; maintaining communications.

Openness and secrecy in nonviolent struggle

Secrecy, deception, and underground conspiracy pose difficult problems for a movement using nonviolent struggle. If operating under a political dictatorship, secrecy will be required at times. Elsewhere, secrecy can pose a serious danger.

Arguments are often made in favor of secrecy in nonviolent struggles in order to surprise the opponents and to catch them unprepared to counter the resistance actions. This is of dubious validity. First, there is a long and successful use of spies and informers within resistance organizations. Also, modern communications technology makes secrecy very difficult to maintain. Second, advance knowledge by the opponents of planned demonstrations, for example, will give the opponents time to consider how to respond. This may reduce the chances of massive brutality.

ties and killings by police and troops who have not received specific instructions on how to act. Third, and most importantly, it is not surprise but the use by a movement of nonviolent struggle that contributes to the opponents' difficulties in handling this type of resistance, as compared to the use of violent resistance.

The effectiveness of nonviolent struggle depends on the very nature of this technique, the choice of strategies of resistance, and the skill of the resisters, as well as their courage and discipline.

An additional danger of practicing secrecy is the reason for its use. Secrecy is often used out of fear, and therefore contributes to fear—which must be abandoned or controlled for nonviolent struggle to operate effectively.

The following discussion assumes that the struggle is occurring within a political system that permits significant civil liberties. Where this is not the case, careful attention is required to determine what knowledge and activities should be secret or revealed.

Nonviolent struggle is based on bravery and discipline. Openness—that is, being truthful with the opponents and the public concerning intentions and plans—may be a corollary of the requirements of fearlessness and nonviolent discipline. Openness leads to liberation from the fear of arrest, disclosure of secrets, break up of resistance organizations, and imprisonment. A mass movement needs to be open. Masses of people cannot participate in a secret resistance movement because secrecy demands that knowledge of plans be held by only a trusted few. Additionally, nonviolent discipline is best achieved in the light of day rather than clandestinely. Secrecy contributes to a smaller movement and can lead to a resort to violence within the resistance movement in order to silence persons suspected of revealing secrets to the opponents.

Secrecy also contributes to paranoia within the movement, a paranoia that tends to increase over time. It often leads to disastrous consequences when internal differences surface under the guise of alleged violations of secrecy. Perhaps one faction may accuse the leader of another faction of being a spy. A paranoid movement cannot function effectively as a resistance movement.

In the struggle to attain freedom, it is necessary to behave like free people. Speaking about psychological liberation when one acts openly and without secrets, on the basis of his experience in the Indian struggles for independence, Jawaharlal Nehru (later

Prime Minister, and earlier an advocate of violent rebellion) wrote:

Above all, we had a sense of freedom and a pride in that freedom. The old feeling of oppression and frustration was completely gone. There was no more whispering, no round-about legal phraseology to avoid getting into trouble with the authorities. We said what we felt and shouted it out from the house tops. What did we care for the consequences? Prison? We looked forward to it; that would help our cause still further. The innumerable spies and secret-service men who used to surround us and follow us about became rather pitiable individuals as there was nothing secret for them to discover. All our cards were always on the table.¹

Effects of the openness on the opponents

Openness will facilitate (but not ensure) the opponents' understanding of the nonviolent struggle group's motives, aims, intentions and plans. Direct contact with the opponents may be repeatedly sought in order to avoid or to correct distortions in perception that would seriously affect the course of the conflict. In some situations, advance notice to the opponents' officials about demonstrations, for example, may not only help to reduce brutalities by surprised police and troops, but may be interpreted as "clean fighting" and chivalry.

Revealing material ordinarily kept secret may be interpreted by the opponents in contrasting ways: the opponents may think that something more important remains secret, or they may become more respectful of the sincerity of the group. The opponents may see admission of the resisters' plans as a weakness and ineptness, or, to the contrary, as a sign of an exceptionally powerful movement capable of success without secrecy.

Negotiation

Where political conditions permit, the nonviolent struggle group should pursue, and be seen to pursue, every effort at a settlement before launching direct action. This greatly increases the group's moral position. Negotiations may help to put the oppo-

¹ Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography* (London: The Bodley Head, 1953), p. 69.

nents in the wrong in the eyes of many persons and groups and to bring sympathy and support to the nonviolent struggle group.

Negotiations will require careful advance consideration by the resisters of what the most important objectives are on which they must remain firm and on what points the negotiators can be flexible or make concessions. Once the demands are set, generally they should not be changed.

It should be remembered that words and moral appeals usually have much less influence on determining the outcome of negotiations than does the strength of the nonviolent resisters. The opponents must consider what the resisters can do if they do not achieve a satisfactory resolution of the conflict short of open struggle. In order to have the greatest effectiveness in both negotiations and in open struggle, the potential resisters need to be well organized and relatively strong—the more organized and stronger the better. However, this is not the occasion for political bragging or bluffing.

It is unlikely that the conflict will be resolved at this stage. Continued preparations for nonviolent struggle during the negotiations are important and realistic. Negotiations are not a substitute for open struggle. A prerequisite for effective negotiations in this situation is a determination and an ability to struggle. The nonviolent army, said Gandhi, should be so well-prepared as to make nonviolent war unnecessary. One ought to demand of the opponents not only promises, but that they should offer some advance deeds as assurances that their promises will be fulfilled.

However, one should not expect miracles. Serious issues cannot be resolved simply by negotiations and dialogue. Fundamental shifts in power relations are often required to correct serious grievances. Effective nonviolent struggle capacity can often give powerful weight to one's words in negotiations. If those strengthened words remain insufficient to induce the opponents to accept the changes sought, then actual struggle will be necessary.

The basic strategy for the struggle having already been determined, if negotiations with the opponents do not show signs of producing satisfactory results, the organizational preparations for the coming conflict will need to be completed.

Sometimes an ultimatum

In some nonviolent struggles, but not all, the next stage will be the issuance of an ultimatum to the opponents. An ultimatum states the minimum demands and the intent to resist. The nonviolent struggle group offers to cancel plans for resistance if the opponents grant those demands (or a major part of them) by a given day and hour. A failure to achieve a mutually agreed upon change will mean that a nonviolent struggle will be launched. The nonviolent struggle group must be capable of carrying out the predicted action.

An ultimatum is issued to influence the opponents, inform the general public, and bolster the morale of the grievance group and increase the willingness of its members to act. Such an ultimatum was common in struggles led or inspired by Mohandas Gandhi, and has frequently been used in labor strikes.

The ultimatum may also be intended to demonstrate that the nonviolent struggle group has made a final effort at a peaceful resolution. This can give the struggle an aura of defensiveness, even as the group prepares for waging strong nonviolent struggle.

In most cases, however, there may be no ultimatum. The nonviolent resisters should not expect that such an ultimatum or declaration will lead to capitulation by the opponents. The opponents are likely to see such a communication as an unjustified challenge to their authority and highly improper behavior for people of a subordinate position. The opponents may therefore become angry, break off any negotiations in progress, or declare that the communication should have been directed to some subordinate official. The opponents may coldly acknowledge receipt of the ultimatum, or ignore it altogether.

If so, the time has come for action.