

Chapter Four

THE METHODS OF NONVIOLENT ACTION

The weapons of nonviolent struggle

The technique of nonviolent action consists of numerous specific “methods,” or forms of action. Such methods serve as the weapons of nonviolent struggle. They are used to conduct the conflict by psychological, social, economic, or political pressure, or a combination of these.

Methods of nonviolent action were introduced in Chapters One and Three and some examples were cited. These included protest marches, flying forbidden flags, massive rallies, vigils, social boycotts, economic boycotts, labor strikes, civil disobedience, boycott of phony elections, strikes by civil servants, sit-ins, hunger strikes, occupation of offices, and creation of a parallel government. Such methods may be used to protest symbolically, end cooperation, or disrupt the operation of the established system.

These and similar methods collectively constitute the overall technique of nonviolent action. Familiarity with their diversity

and characteristics is crucial to understanding nonviolent struggle as a whole and its variations in action.

Understanding the methods of nonviolent action

The many specific methods, or weapons, of nonviolent action are classified into three groups:

1. Protest and persuasion
2. Noncooperation
3. Nonviolent intervention

The following list of 198 methods is intended only to show the range of options available to groups that are using or considering the use of nonviolent struggle. The list is far from complete. Full definitions of each method and historical examples of its use are provided in *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*.¹ Many additional methods doubtless exist, and many new ones could certainly be invented or learned from other groups. Scholars studying this technique, as well as resisters contemplating how they can most effectively conduct a future struggle, are strongly encouraged to study Part Two of the above volume, which is published separately as *The Methods of Nonviolent Action*.

This chapter is not intended as a guide to the selection and application of the methods, but only as a survey of the various types of available methods. Factors to be considered in the selection of methods for a particular conflict will be discussed in Chapter Thirty-seven.

The wise selection of specific methods for use requires knowledge not only of the whole range of possible methods of action but also of the strategy that has been developed for the waging of the conflict.

As we will discuss in Part Four, careful strategic planning is very important *before* the selection of specific methods in a given conflict. Strategic calculation and planning are required to identify what kinds of pressure the resisters need to apply against

¹ See Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, Part Two, *The Methods of Nonviolent Action*, Boston: Porter Sargent Publisher, 1973.

their opponents, and therefore what specific methods the resisters need to employ.

I. ACTIONS TO SEND A MESSAGE

NONVIOLENT PROTEST AND PERSUASION

Nonviolent protest and persuasion include numerous methods that are mainly symbolic acts of peaceful opposition or attempted persuasion. These extend beyond verbal expressions of opinion but stop short of noncooperation or nonviolent intervention. The use of these methods shows that the resisters are against or in favor of something, the degree of opposition or support, and, sometimes, the number of people involved.

The impact of these methods on the attitudes of others will vary considerably. It is possible that where a particular method is common, its influence in a single instance may be less than in locations where the method has hitherto been rare or unknown. The political conditions in which the method occurs are also likely to influence its impact. Dictatorial conditions make an act of nonviolent protest less common and more dangerous. Hence, if it does occur, the act may be more dramatic and may receive greater attention than it would where the act is common or carries no penalty.

The message may be intended to influence the opponents, the public, the grievance group², or a combination of the three. Attempts to influence the opponents usually focus on convincing them to correct or halt certain actions, or to do what the grievance group wants. The methods of nonviolent protest and persuasion may also be selected to facilitate a concurrent or later application of other methods, especially the forms of noncooperation. Fifty-four methods of nonviolent protest and persuasion are included in this listing, grouped here in ten subclasses.

Formal statements

1. Public speeches

² The grievance group is the general population group whose grievances are issues in the conflict and are being championed by the nonviolent resisters.

2. Letters of opposition or support
3. Declarations by organizations and institutions
4. Signed public statements
5. Declarations of indictment and intention
6. Group or mass petition

Communications with a wider audience

7. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols (written, painted, drawn, printed, gestures, spoken, or mimicked)
8. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
9. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
10. Newspapers and journals
11. Recordings, radio, television, and video
12. Skywriting and earthwriting

Group presentations

13. Deputations
14. Mock awards
15. Group lobbying
16. Picketing
17. Mock elections

Symbolic public acts

18. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
19. Wearing of symbols (advocacy buttons, patches)
20. Prayer and worship
21. Delivering symbolic objects
22. Protest disrobings
23. Destruction of own property (homes, documents, credentials, etc.)
24. Symbolic lights (torches, lanterns, candles)
25. Displays of portraits

26. Paint as protest
27. New signs and names and/or symbolic names
28. Symbolic sounds ("symbolic tunes" with whistles, bells, sirens, etc.)
29. Symbolic reclamations (takeover of lands or buildings)
30. Rude gestures

Pressure on individuals

31. "Haunting" officials (may involve constantly following them, or reminding them, or may be silent and respectful)
32. Taunting officials (mocking or insulting them)
33. Fraternization (subjecting persons to intense direct influence to convince them that the regime they serve is unjust)
34. Vigils

Drama and music

35. Humorous skits and pranks
36. Performance of plays and music
37. Singing

Processions

38. Marches
39. Parades
40. Religious processions
41. Pilgrimages
42. Motorcades

Honoring the dead

43. Political mourning
44. Mock funerals

- 45. Demonstrative funerals
- 46. Homage at burial places

Public assemblies

- 47. Assemblies of protest or support
- 48. Protest meetings
- 49. Camouflaged meetings of protest
- 50. Teach-ins with several informed speakers

Withdrawal and renunciation

- 51. Walk-outs
- 52. Silence
- 53. Renunciation of honors
- 54. Turning one's back

All these are symbolic actions. Greater power is wielded by the methods of noncooperation and nonviolent intervention.

II. ACTIONS TO SUSPEND COOPERATION AND ASSISTANCE

METHODS OF NONCOOPERATION

Overwhelmingly, the methods of nonviolent struggle involve noncooperation with the opponents. "Noncooperation" means that the resisters in a conflict either deliberately withdraw some form or degree of existing cooperation with the opponents or the resisters refuse to initiate certain forms of new cooperation. Noncooperation involves the deliberate discontinuance, withholding, or defiance of certain existing relationships—social, economic, or political. The action may be spontaneous or planned, and it may be legal or illegal.

The impact of the various forms of noncooperation hinges heavily on the number of people participating in the use of these methods and the degree to which the opponents are dependent on the persons and groups that are refusing cooperation. The classes

of noncooperation are social, economic, and political noncooperation.

A. Actions to suspend social relations

The methods of social noncooperation

Social noncooperation is the refusal to carry on normal social relations, either particular or general, with persons or groups regarded as having perpetrated some wrong or injustice, or refusal to comply with certain behavior patterns or practices. Fifteen methods are listed in three subgroups of social noncooperation:

Ostracism of persons

- 55. Social boycott
- 56. Selective social boycott
- 57. Lysistratic nonaction (sexual boycott)
- 58. Excommunication (religious boycott)
- 59. Interdiction (suspension of religious services)

Noncooperation with social events, customs, and institutions

- 60. Suspension of social and sports activities
- 61. Boycott of social affairs
- 62. Student strike
- 63. Social disobedience (of social customs or rules)
- 64. Withdrawal from social institutions

Withdrawal from the social system

- 65. Stay-at-home
- 66. Total personal noncooperation
- 67. Flight of workers (fleeing elsewhere)
- 68. Sanctuary (withdrawal to a place where you cannot be touched without violation of religious, moral, social, or legal prohibitions)

69. Collective disappearance (the inhabitants of a small area abandon their homes and villages)
70. Protest emigration (hijrat: a deliberate permanent emigration)

B. Actions to suspend economic relations

The methods of economic noncooperation

These methods involve the suspension or refusal to initiate specific types of economic relationships. This noncooperation takes many forms that are grouped under the subclasses of economic boycotts and labor strikes.

(1) Economic boycotts

An economic boycott is the refusal to buy, sell, handle, or distribute specific goods and services, and often also includes efforts to induce others to withdraw such cooperation. In this list are twenty-five methods divided into six subgroups of economic boycotts.

Action by consumers

71. Consumers' boycott of certain goods or firms
72. Nonconsumption of boycotted goods (those already in one's possession)
73. Policy of austerity (reducing consumption to an absolute minimum)
74. Rent withholding (rent strike)
75. Refusal to rent
76. National consumers' boycott (refusal to buy products or use services from another country)
77. International consumers' boycott (operating in several countries against the products of a particular country)

Actions by workers and producers

- 78. Workmen's boycott (refusal to work with products or tools provided by the opponents)
- 79. Producers' boycott (refusal by producers to sell or otherwise deliver their products)

Action by middlemen

- 80. Suppliers' or handlers' boycott (refusal by workers or middlemen to handle or supply certain goods)

Action by owners and management

- 81. Traders' boycott (refusal by retailers to buy or sell certain goods)
- 82. Refusal to let or sell property
- 83. Lockout (the employer initiates the work stoppage by temporarily shutting down the operation)
- 84. Refusal of industrial assistance
- 85. Merchants' "general strike"

Action by holders of financial resources

- 86. Withdrawal of bank deposits
- 87. Refusal to pay fees, dues, and assessments
- 88. Refusal to pay debts or interest
- 89. Severance of funds and credit
- 90. Revenue refusal (refusal to provide the government with revenue voluntarily)
- 91. Refusal of a government's money (demand alternative ways of payment)

Action by governments

- 92. Domestic embargo
- 93. Blacklisting of traders
- 94. International sellers' embargo

- 95. International buyers' embargo
- 96. International trade embargo

(2) Labor strikes

The methods of the strike involve the refusal to continue economic cooperation through work. Strikes are collective, deliberate, and normally temporary suspensions of labor designed to impose pressure on others. While the unit within which a strike is applied is usually an industrial one, it may also be political, social, agricultural, or cultural, depending on the nature of the grievance. Twenty-three types of strikes are listed here in seven subgroups.

Symbolic strikes

- 97. Protest strike (for a pre-announced short period)
- 98. Quickie walkout (lightning strike: short, spontaneous protest strike)

Agricultural strikes

- 99. Peasant strike
- 100. Farm workers' strike

Strikes by special groups

- 101. Refusal of impressed labor
- 102. Prisoners' strike
- 103. Craft strike
- 104. Professional strike

Ordinary industrial strikes

- 105. Establishment strike (in one or more plants under one management)
- 106. Industry strike (suspension of work in all the establishments of an industry)

107. Sympathetic strike (solidarity strike to support the demands of fellow workers)

Restricted strikes

108. Detailed strike (worker by worker, or area by area; piecemeal stoppage)
109. Bumper strike (the union strikes only one firm in an industry at a time)
110. Slowdown strike
111. Working-to-rule strike (the literal carrying out of regulations in order to retard production)
112. Sick-in (reporting "sick")
113. Strike by resignation (a significant number of workers resign individually)
114. Limited strike (workers refuse to perform certain marginal work or refuse to work on certain days)
115. Selective strike (workers refuse to do certain types of work)

Multi-industry strikes

116. Generalized strike (several industries are struck simultaneously)
117. General strike (all industries are struck simultaneously)

Combination of strikes and economic closures

118. Hartal (economic life temporarily suspended on a voluntary basis)
119. Economic shutdown (workers strike and employers simultaneously halt economic activities)

C. Actions to suspend political submission and assistance

The methods of political noncooperation

This class consists of methods that withhold or withdraw cooperation in political matters. The aim may be to achieve a particular limited objective or to change the nature or composition of a government, or even to produce its disintegration. This list consists of thirty-seven methods divided into six subgroups.

Rejection of authority

- 120. Withholding or withdrawal of allegiance
- 121. Refusal of public support (for the existing regime and its policies)
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance

Citizens' noncooperation with government

- 123. Boycott of legislative bodies by its members
- 124. Boycott of elections
- 125. Boycott of government employment and positions
- 126. Boycott of government departments, agencies, and other bodies
- 127. Withdrawal from government educational institutions
- 128. Boycott of government-supported organizations
- 129. Refusal of assistance to enforcement agents
- 130. Removal of own signs and placemarkers
- 131. Refusal to accept appointed officials
- 132. Refusal to dissolve existing institutions

Citizens' alternatives to obedience

- 133. Reluctant and slow compliance
- 134. Nonobedience in absence of direct supervision
- 135. Popular nonobedience (not publicized, discreet)

- 136. Disguised disobedience (looks like compliance)
- 137. Refusal of an assemblage or meeting to disperse
- 138. Sit-down
- 139. Noncooperation with conscription and deportation
- 140. Hiding, escape, and false identities
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws

Action by government personnel

- 142. Selective refusal of assistance by government aides (as refusal to carry out particular instructions; informing superiors of the refusal)
- 143. Blocking lines of command and information
- 144. Stalling and obstruction
- 145. General administrative noncooperation
- 146. Judicial noncooperation (by judges)
- 147. Deliberate inefficiency and selective noncooperation by enforcement agents
- 148. Mutiny

Domestic governmental action

- 149. Quasi-legal evasions and delays
- 150. Noncooperation by constituent governmental units

International governmental action

- 151. Changes in diplomatic and other representation
- 152. Delay and cancellation of diplomatic events
- 153. Withholding of diplomatic recognition
- 154. Severance of diplomatic relations
- 155. Withdrawal from international organizations
- 156. Refusal of membership in international bodies
- 157. Expulsion from international organizations

III. METHODS OF DISRUPTION

THE METHODS OF NONVIOLENT INTERVENTION

In contrast to the methods of protest and persuasion and of noncooperation, these are methods that intervene directly to change a given situation. Negative interventions may disrupt, and even destroy, established behavior patterns, policies, relationships, or institutions. Positive interventions may establish new behavior patterns, policies, relationships, or institutions.

Certain methods of nonviolent intervention can pose a more direct and immediate challenge to the opponents than the methods of protest and noncooperation, and may thereby produce more rapid changes. These methods may include sit-ins, nonviolent invasion, nonviolent interjection, nonviolent obstruction, nonviolent occupation, nonviolent land seizure, seeking imprisonment, and dual sovereignty and parallel government.

The methods of nonviolent intervention are, however, usually both harder for the resisters to sustain and harder for the opponents to withstand. Use of these methods may bring speedier and more severe repression than the methods of nonviolent protest and persuasion and the forms of noncooperation.

The methods of intervention may be used defensively: to maintain behavior patterns, institutions, independent initiatives, etc., or they can be used offensively to carry the struggle for the resisters' objectives into the opponents' own camp, even without any immediate provocation.

This list includes forty methods divided into five subgroups, according to the dominant means of expression of the intervention itself.

Psychological intervention

- 158. Self-exposure to the elements
- 159. The fast
- 160. Reverse trial (defendants become unofficial "prosecutors")
- 161. Nonviolent harassment

Physical intervention

162. Sit-in
163. Stand-in
164. Ride-in
165. Wade-in
166. Mill-in (gather in some place of symbolic significance and remain mobile)
167. Pray-in
168. Nonviolent raids (march to designated key point and demand possession)
169. Nonviolent air raids (perhaps bringing leaflets or food)
170. Nonviolent invasion
171. Nonviolent interjection (placing one's body between a person and the objective of his work or activity)
172. Nonviolent obstruction (generally temporary)
173. Nonviolent occupations

Social intervention

174. Establishing new social patterns
175. Overloading of facilities
176. Stall-in
177. Speak-in
178. Guerrilla theater (improvised dramatic interruptions)
179. Alternative social institutions
180. Alternative communication systems

Economic intervention

181. Reverse strike (working to excess)
182. Stay-in strike (occupation of work site)

- 183. Nonviolent land seizure
- 184. Defiance of blockades
- 185. Politically motivated counterfeiting
- 186. Preclusive purchasing
- 187. Seizure of assets
- 188. Dumping
- 189. Selective patronage
- 190. Alternative markets
- 191. Alternative transportation systems
- 192. Alternative economic institutions

Political intervention

- 193. Overloading of administrative systems
- 194. Disclosing identities of secret agents
- 195. Seeking imprisonment
- 196. Civil disobedience of “neutral” laws
- 197. Work-on without collaboration
- 198. Dual sovereignty and parallel government

The impact of the use of any of these methods depends on the adequacy and competency of their application, as well as important other factors in the conflict.

Learning from the past practice of such methods

Nonviolent struggles using these methods have occurred throughout human history. While the twentieth century was one of great violence and extreme dictatorships, genocide, nuclear weapons, massive slaughters, terrorism, and world wars, it was also a century of a multitude of nonviolent struggles.

The following chapters offer brief accounts of some of these important but highly imperfect struggles. They are intended to illustrate the historical scope of the practice of this technique in the twentieth century, the variety of opponents confronted by it, and

the differing results of these conflicts. These accounts also offer examples of the application of many of these specific methods.

Much can be learned from these cases of nonviolent struggle, both positively and negatively. These cases also can give us important insights into both the potential of this technique and the problems of waging nonviolent struggle.

