

WHO IS AFRAID OF NONVIOLENT PEOPLE?

Despite the great violence of our world, the ruthless dictatorships, widespread poverty and exploitation, and widespread popular helplessness of oppressed people, the 20th century and the new one have seen the emergence of the practice of powerful movements able to expand justice and freedom by actions of nonviolent people.

Building on decades of experience, study, and learning in many parts of the world, nonviolent struggle has emerged as a realistic alternative to both violence and passivity. People have begun to learn that they need not be the victims of violent oppression nor the tools manipulative elites of their own country or foreign regimes.

People are capable of self-liberation when they learn of the possibility of increasing their own power self-reliantly, when they refuse to fight with their oppressors' best weapons, but instead defy injustices and domination with the social, economic, psychological, and political weapons of people power. They are beginning to learn that their courage is more likely to be effective when they learn what they are doing and how to do it skillfully. They can learn from experience and study what will help them to succeed and what will doom them to disaster. Some people are even learning that strategic planning can increase the power of their bravery.

In a world of extreme violence, oppression, and suffering, one might expect that this increased knowledge of peaceful empowerment to advance freedom and justice would be widely welcomed. By many people, that is true. But not by all.

Building on courageous actions of many people in many countries and the work of scholars of self-reliant nonviolent struggle, the Albert Einstein Institution has since 1983 sought to increase knowledge of this option. At times this work has been helped by persons wise enough to see its capacity. We never tell people in another country what to do. We simply advance and make available information about the nature and potential of nonviolent action.

At times, some persons, elites, and regimes have accurately seen this nonviolent struggle as a threat to their favorite panacea or political, economic, or social system of domination.

Major efforts have therefore been made to weaken and destroy the capacity to spread the know-how of nonviolent struggle. Sometimes this has been done by provoking resisters to switch to self-defeating violence, putting agents provocateurs into resistance movements, and brutal repression. Sometimes, literature containing knowledge of these means of peaceful liberation have been banned and literature about it has been burned and persons possessing it have been jailed.

In recent years and weeks, several persons, publications, and regimes have been spreading half-truths and outright lies about the Albert Einstein Institution and myself. We receive no instructions or funding from any government or intelligence agency. These lies have doubtless been aimed to discredit our work. Who is it now who so fears nonviolent people?

There are persons, groups, publications, and regimes who fear nonviolent people with knowledge of nonviolent alternatives to self-defeating violence and passive submission to oppression.

We who have been falsely accused could spend all our time attempting to deny the lies and thereby be silenced about this important knowledge that people can use for nonviolent self-liberation. That would make those who spread falsehoods successful.

We choose not to give them that victory. Instead, we choose to persist as best we can to learn more about these means of action and to make them available to people who believe they need nonviolent means of self-reliant empowerment.

Gene Sharp

