

# **Chapter Thirty-three**

## **FOUR WAYS SUCCESS MAY BE ACHIEVED**

### **Four routes to success**

Nonviolent struggle can be successful only when the necessary conditions exist or have been created. More often than is usually recognized, it is within the capacity of the resisters to create many of these conditions through deliberate acts.

It is possible to distinguish four broad processes, or mechanisms, that can bring success: conversion, accommodation, non-violent coercion, and disintegration.

### **Conversion**

“By conversion we mean that the opponent, as the result of the actions of the nonviolent struggle group or person, comes around to a new point of view which embraces the ends of the nonviolent

actor," wrote George Lakey.<sup>1</sup> This mechanism may be influenced by reason, argumentation, emotions, beliefs, attitudes, and morals.

Conversion in nonviolent struggle thus aims not simply to free the subordinate group, but also to free the opponents who are thought to be imprisoned by their own system and policies. Advocates of this mechanism often say that the nonviolent struggle group in its own attitudes and actions seeks to separate the "evil" from the "evildoer," to remove the "evil" while salvaging the "evildoer."

Self-suffering is often considered important in triggering conversion. Some users of nonviolent struggle believe that self-suffering is not only required to neutralize or to immobilize the opponents' repression, but also that it can be the main means to convert the opponents. Suffering, some contend, attacks rationalizations and overcomes indifference. Suffering then is no longer only a risk, it also becomes a weapon.

The greater the "social distance"—the degree of separation of "fellow feeling," mutual understanding, and empathy—between the contending groups, the less the possibility of conversion. The lesser the social distance, the easier will be the possibility of conversion. Some nonviolent resisters seeking conversion of their opponents may take steps to reduce or to remove the social distance between the contending groups in order to facilitate this mechanism.

Conversion may result because of rational and/or emotional changes in the opponents' thinking and views. Precisely what these changes are will differ, depending on the individuals, the events, and how long the process has been in operation. Conversion may result in various changes in the opponents' behavior, beliefs, feelings, or worldviews. Individuals differ widely in their susceptibility to conversion.

The factors influencing conversion include the degree of conflict of interest and the social distance between the contending groups, the personalities of the opponents, shared or contrasting beliefs and norms between the groups, and the role of third parties.

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<sup>1</sup> George Lakey, "The Sociological Mechanisms of Nonviolent Struggle" (*Peace Research Reviews*, vol. II, no. 6 [December 1968]), p. 12.

If the nonviolent struggle group deliberately seeks to achieve change through conversion of its opponents, it can facilitate this mechanism by refraining from violence and hostility, attempting to gain the opponents' trust by truthfulness, remaining open concerning intentions, exhibiting chivalry, maintaining a pleasant personal appearance and habits, refraining from humiliating the opponents, making visible sacrifices, carrying on constructive work, maintaining personal contact with the opponents, demonstrating trust of the opponents, or developing empathy.

For a variety of reasons, including unsatisfactory fulfillment of the above influential factors, conversion efforts may only partially succeed or may fail completely. Some persons and groups may be especially resistant to conversion. Many practitioners of nonviolent struggle even reject conversion, believing it to be impossible or impractical. If conversion fails, or is not attempted, nonviolent struggle offers three other mechanisms by which change can be achieved.

### **Accommodation**

In accommodation, the opponents are neither converted nor nonviolently coerced. The opponents, without having changed their minds fundamentally about the issues involved, resolve to grant at least some of the demands of the nonviolent resisters. The opponents decide to yield on an issue rather than risk a still more unsatisfactory result. Influences that might otherwise have led to conversion or to nonviolent coercion may be involved. Accommodation occurs while the opponents still have a choice. However, the social situation has been so significantly changed by the conflict that the opponents must accept some changes. Among the factors leading to accommodation are these:

- Violent repression is seen as no longer appropriate.
- The opponents believe they are eliminating a nuisance by accommodating themselves to some or all of the resisters' demands.
- The opponents are adjusting to opposition within their own group, and acting to prevent the growth of that opposition.

- The opponents are acting to minimize economic losses that are expected to grow.
- The opponents are bowing gracefully to the inevitable, avoiding the humiliation of defeat and possibly salvaging something more than would be possible later. At times, the opponents may act to prevent people from learning how much power the populace really can wield.

### **Nonviolent coercion and disintegration**

In nonviolent coercion, the opponents are not converted, nor do they decide to accommodate to the demands. Rather, shifts of social forces and power relationships produce the changes sought by the resisters against the will of the opponents, while the opponents still remain in their existing positions. (This assumes that the changes sought do not include the removal of government officials or the disintegration of the regime.)

Roughly speaking, nonviolent coercion may take place in any of three ways:

- The defiance becomes too widespread and massive to be controlled by the opponents' repression and other means of control.
- The noncooperation and the defiance make it impossible for the social, economic, and political system to operate unless the resisters' demands are achieved.
- Even the opponents' ability to apply repression is undermined or dissolved because their own forces for applying repression (police or military) become unreliable or disintegrate.

In any of these cases, despite their resolution not to grant the resisters' demands, the opponents may discover that it is impossible for them to defend or impose their objectionable policies or system.

Coercion is not limited to the effects or the threat of use of physical violence. The key factors in coercion are

- whether the opponents' will is blocked despite their continued efforts to impose it; and

- whether the opponents have the capacity to implement their will.

Coercion is the use of either physical or nonphysical force to compel or restrict action.

Nonviolent coercion resulting from widespread noncooperation can at times be so effective that it temporarily paralyzes the opponents' power. The concept of disintegration takes the process one step further.

Disintegration results from the more severe application of the same forces that produce nonviolent coercion. However, those forces operate more extremely in disintegration, so that the opponents' regime or group falls completely apart. No coherent body remains capable even of accepting defeat. The opponents' power has been dissolved.

The power of coercion and disintegration is possible because of the capacity of nonviolent struggle to cut off the opponents' sources of power, which were discussed in Chapter Two. This technique becomes coercive or disintegrative when the people applying it decisively withhold or withdraw the necessary sources of the opponents' power in the following areas:

**(1) Authority:** The mere application of nonviolent struggle may both show how much authority the opponents have already lost and also may help to undermine their authority still further. The opponents' authority may weaken or even dissolve. In addition, the people who have repudiated the opponents' authority may then, under extreme circumstances, transfer their loyalty to a rival claimant in the form of a parallel government.

**(2) Human resources:** Nonviolent noncooperation and disobedience may sever the human resources required for the opponents' power. These may include the general population, and the grievance group, as well as the nonviolent resisters. The result may greatly increase the opponents' enforcement problems while weakening their power capacity. Widespread tenacious noncooperation may paralyze the system.

**(3) Skills and knowledge:** A withdrawal of cooperation by key personnel, technicians, officers, administrators, etc., may have an impact on the opponents' power quite disproportionate to the numbers actually noncooperating. A challenge by nonvio-

lent struggle seems especially likely to aggravate conflicts within the opponents' regime, thereby reducing the available skills, knowledge, insight, energy, and the like needed to deal with the challenge.

**(4) Intangible factors:** Nonviolent struggle can threaten habits of obedience, and bring political beliefs and official dogmas into question. The resistance and disobedience may reflect prior changes in attitudes and beliefs, and may also help to erode further the habit of unquestioning obedience and to develop conscious choice of whether or not to obey.

**(5) Material resources:** Nonviolent resistance may regulate the amount of material resources available to the opponents. These resources include transportation, communication, economic and financial resources, raw materials, and the like. Of the 198 methods of nonviolent struggle, 61 are directly economic in form: boycotts, strikes, and several methods of intervention. Other methods may have indirect economic consequences.

**(6) Sanctions:** Even the opponents' ability to apply sanctions against the resistance may be reduced or removed by nonviolent struggle. Those who help to provide the sanctions—the police and the military forces—may carry out orders inefficiently, or in extreme cases ignore them or disobey them completely. Such laxity or disobedience is more likely against nonviolent resistance than violent resistance. The reduced reliability of sanctions, or even their severance as a result of mutinies, will have a serious impact on the opponents' power position.

The factors that produce nonviolent coercion and disintegration occur in different combinations and proportions. The contribution of each factor depends upon the degree to which it regulates one or more of the opponents' necessary sources of power. Nonviolent coercion or disintegration is more likely where

- The number of nonviolent resisters is very large.
- The opponents depend on the resisters for the sources of the opponents' power.
- The group or groups refusing assistance to the opponents are significant in terms of the assistance normally provided.

- The nonviolent struggle group is skilled in applying the technique of nonviolent struggle.
- The defiance and noncooperation can be maintained for significant time.
- For certain services or supplies, the opponents depend on third parties that are supportive of the nonviolent struggle group.
- The opponents' means of control and repression prove to be insufficient or ineffective in the face of massive defiance.
- There is opposition within the opponent group to the policies at issue or to the repression. This includes attention to the number of dissidents, the intensity of their disagreement, and the types of action they use, such as strikes and mutinies.

Skillfully applied nonviolent struggle may offer greater chances of success than political violence in the same circumstances. However, victory cannot be guaranteed. Changes will occur, for better or worse. Frequently, as in all conflicts, the results are mixtures of defeat and success in varying proportions.

