

# DISREGARDED HISTORY

## The Power of Nonviolent Action

Gene Sharp

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### Berlin, 1943

It was the late autumn of 1943 in the capital of the Third Reich, in the midst of the war, towards the end—so far as Germany itself was concerned—of “the Final Solution” to the “Jewish question.” The extermination program, and the decision to adopt it, had not been undertaken until the war was well underway, though the Nazis had long wanted to carry out such a program. The Jews who still remained “at liberty,” if one could use such a phrase, were predominantly those who had special characteristics that had caused them to be left until the end. Some of them were intellectuals and members of the Berlin artistic community, and some of them were Jews who were married to non-Jews.

On this day, the Gestapo was preparing for final action. Trucks drew up in front of factories and homes to cart off the Jews who remained in Berlin.

All day, the account goes, the trucks rolled through the streets, escorted by armed SS men, and crammed with those for whom this was the beginning of the end. On this day every Jew who was still alive in Germany was arrested and temporarily housed in a prison or camp while awaiting transportation to an extermination camp.

It is said that people on the street who noticed what was happening lowered their eyes and looked away in indifference or shame. They did nothing.

The Jews were taken to various points in Berlin and divided according to “appropriate” bureaucratic categories. Those men who were married to non-Jewish wives were temporarily housed in a prison of the Rosenstrasse near Gestapo headquarters.

*Then something happened which had no parallel in the history of the Third Reich.*

Somehow or other, their wives found out where they were. They gathered on the Platz outside of the prison and publicly demanded that their Jewish husbands be released: an act of audacity, defiance and courage, certainly. But it was also a demand that flew in the face of the Nazi objective to remake Germany and Europe biologically by exterminating those who were regarded as less than human. *If the Nazis granted the demands of the women, they would have thereby given up one of their supreme objectives.* After a while the women’s demonstration broke up, only to reassemble later in the afternoon. When again they shouted and cried above the traffic demanding that their husbands be released, their husbands came to the

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windows of the prison defying all orders to the contrary, and again, with great audacity, demanded their own release. Gestapo headquarters was nearby.

Anything you have read or heard or seen on films of the nature of the Nazi system and its methods is almost certainly true. A few machine guns located on the roofs of buildings could have eliminated the women. But the Gestapo did not shoot them. Not this time. Instead, they consented to negotiate and asked the women to be reasonable. The women continued to insist that their husbands be released. Heinz Ullstein, from whose book the account comes, who was himself one of these men and his wife one of the demonstrators, says that the Nazi regime was shaken by an incident that had no equal in Nazi Germany. The authorities gave reassurances; they spoke soothingly. *And they released the prisoners.*

## Guatemala, 1944

It is the following spring in 1944, on the other side of the Atlantic in Guatemala where General Jorge Ubico had ruled with an iron fist, to say the least, since 1931, and thousands of Guatemalans had been shot for being suspected revolutionaries. Sometimes American magazines described him as the kind of dictator that built roads and schools, you know, with the kind of dictatorial regime that is necessary for “development,” in the language we use these days. Ubico at the time of Hitler’s 1934 blood purge said, “I am like Hitler. I execute first and hold the trial afterwards.” Then World War II came and Ubico, knowing which side of the Atlantic his bread was buttered on, joined the allies. Some American troops were stationed there during the war. There was discussion of the four freedoms for which that war was being fought. Domestic issues were causing unrest,

both in the business community and among the working people. But much more dangerous than all of that, in nearby El Salvador, where a significant military revolt against the dictator, Hernandez Martinez, had been crushed, women and then students initiated, and finally the whole population joined in, a nonviolent revolution. Within a couple of weeks they had totally destroyed the dictatorship. Hernandez Martinez had retired from politics and left the country.

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The example was deliberately imitated in Guatemala. The action began slowly at first. In late May, forty-five lawyers publicly asked that the judge who tried most of the civil, as distinct

from military, cases of opponents of the regime should be removed from office. Ubico asked for specific charges and amazingly, a newspaper was allowed to print them. Then the day before the annual Loyalty Day parade that the teachers and pupils in the schools staged in favor of the dictator, two hundred teachers petitioned Ubico for a wage increase. The teachers who drafted the petition were arrested. They were charged with conspiracy against social institutions of the supreme government. Teachers replied the next day with a boycott of the parade and those who boycotted the parade were fired from their jobs.

On the 30th of June, a manifesto announced the formation of a Social Democratic Party and called for the rights of opposition parties, for social justice, for a lifting of the terror, and hemispheric solidarity. Students then petitioned for university autonomy—and for the rehiring of two discharged teachers and the release of the law students who had been jailed. They threatened that they would call a students’ strike if their demands were not met in full within twenty-four hours. And since student strikes are almost always “innocuous” and “helpless” and “don’t really accomplish anything,” all Ubico did was declare a state of national emergency. He denounced the

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opposition as Nazi fascist. He of all people! And students who knew what had happened to many of the other opposition people became frightened. Some of their leaders took refuge in the Mexican Embassy. But some young lawyers and professional men, in support of the students, refused to submit. Then the schoolteachers who had not been arrested went on strike. And you know that dictators are always telling us, both dictators-that-are and dictators-to-be, how popular they are. "It is not necessary to have an election because we have unanimity in our country behind the purposes of the government," or, "There was a massive plebiscite to indicate we have ninety-nine and <sup>44</sup>/<sub>100</sub> percent support." Ubico had not done it quite that way, but against charges that he was dictatorial he had said, "If three hundred respected Guatemalans were even to ask me to resign without an election, I would resign."

Well, in a few days two men came to the National Palace carrying a piece of paper. They delivered "the memorial of the 311," people who had quite literally risked their lives by signing their names demanding that he resign. They explained in the document the reasons for the unrest. They asked for effective constitutional guarantees and for suspension of martial law. The same day students marched past the American Embassy with their hands lowered at their sides to emphasize nonviolent means. The officials seemed surprised with that type of demonstration. That evening there was a peaceful meeting that demanded Ubico's resignation from office.

That night, however, at a neighborhood religious and social celebration, there was an outbreak of violence. Some say people got too drunk. Some say agents were put into the crowd to create violence. Hundreds were beaten and arrested.

The next day the foreign minister summoned to the National Palace the two men who had delivered the memorial. The head of the secret police joined them. Simultaneously in front of the National Palace there was another demonstration and, since nonviolent demonstrations are supposedly "helpless" and "innocuous," again the government didn't do "very much." All they did was to summon against it platoons of soldiers, the cavalry, armored cars, tanks, machine guns and police armed with guns and tear gas bombs. The two men who had been called to the National Palace, instead of being arrested or executed, were asked to calm the people. Although all meetings had been banned, they were allowed to consult with other so-called leaders of the movement in order to seek an end to the crisis.

In the afternoon, in response to the beatings and arrests of the previous night, women went to the Church of San Francisco in the center of the city to hold a religious service, and then, dressed in mourning, they left the church, forming an impressive silent procession. The cavalry charged, firing into the crowd of women. Several were wounded, and Maria Chincilla Recinos was killed.

**The public response was a silent paralysis. Talks between the opposition and the government were broken off by the opposition. Workers stayed home.**

The public response was a silent paralysis. Talks between the opposition and the government were broken off by the opposition. Workers stayed home. Places of recreation closed. Civil servants and workers stayed home. Businessmen shut their stores and offices. The streets were deserted.

Ubico had to engage the foreign diplomatic corps to get another meeting with the opposition. When the delegates of the opposition came into the National Palace they were more brazen than ever. They told Ubico to his face that during his rule their country had known nothing but dictatorship and oppression. Ubico insisted that

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as long as he was president there would be no nonsense of freedom of expression or the press or elections because they, the people, were not ready for it. The question of his resigning was then discussed, and the question of a succession. The delegates left, and later reported to Ubico that it was the unanimous desire of the population that he should resign.

Petitions and messages from important people began pouring into the National Palace demanding that Ubico resign. The silent economic shutdown and paralysis of Guatemala City continued. And finally, on the first of July Ubico withdrew—initially in favor of a triumvirate of generals. The government later became civilian. The rights of labor organizations to begin work, of opposition parties to carry on activities, freedom of the press—all of these things came. Ultimately, the victory was not well used, as various political groups and parties jockeyed for power. Involvement of the CIA in bringing down the government nearly ten years later is well known. *But the 1944 revolution had been a victory, which showed that nonviolent struggle was capable of dealing even with a Latin American dictator.* There are other cases in Latin America of a similar type.

## Norway, 1940

Norway was invaded by the Nazis on the 9th of April 1940. Norway had tried to remain neutral. Independent from Sweden since 1905, the people loved their freedom and didn't want it taken away by being involved in a war. They also had a strong anti-military socialist movement. If the Germans had only waited for two or three days, the Norwegians could have had the fortune of being invaded by both sides in the war on exactly the same day. Already by the 7th of April British troops were being loaded on board ships in Scotland for a pos-

sible invasion and occupation of Norway—which shows the glorious effectiveness of neutrality!

Before the war a native Norwegian fascist party existed, headed by a man named Vidkun Quisling, who had had a significant political career before he became a fascist. After he became a fascist, his party—the Nasjonal Samling—never polled more than five percent of the votes. Under the occupation, Quisling became the Minister-President of Norway. He sought to create a fascist system in Norway, patterned after Mussolini's Italy or, more properly, the Nazi system of *Gleichschaltung*. He sought to organize the various occupational and professional groups into “corporations”—compulsory organizations rigidly controlled by the government. Thus, everyone—farmers, fishermen, teachers, doctors, etc.—would be enrolled in an organization controlled by a little dictator and every working person and the institutions of the whole society

would come under government control. This was the plan Quisling chose to start with the teachers. It was a serious mistake.

The underground was alert to the grave danger of putting teachers under Nazi control and having them indoctrinate the children, and the long-range change in the nature of Norwegian society that would result. Calling for resistance to the program, it drafted a short statement and circulated it to all twelve thousand teachers throughout the country, in spite of censorship and transportation restrictions. Each teacher was asked to sign his or her name and address and mail that statement to the fascist Ministry of Education. Between eight and ten thousand teachers complied. The letters poured in. The statement said that the teachers could not take part in the fascist education of youth and concluded: “I cannot regard myself as a member of the new teachers' organization.”

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*The government panicked.* It threatened dismissal of all the teachers, but they would not withdraw their protests. The schools were closed. Officially, there was a fuel shortage; it was impossible to keep the schools warm, they said. So the people chopped wood and left it outside. But the schools remained closed. Teachers held classes in homes. Despite the censorship of radio and newspapers, news of the resistance spread until thousands of letters of protest poured into the Ministry of Education *signed by parents.*

One thousand male teachers were arrested and sent to various camps and prisons. Those from Southern Norway were concentrated in a prison north of Oslo, where, in the middle of winter, a bit of black bread was all they had to eat each day, along with “vegetable soup” that was mostly water. The teachers were forced to crawl and run in deep snow. They could not dry off afterward in their unheated barracks, and they had no change of clothes. As this went on day after day, about a half dozen teachers withdrew their protest. The rest (excepting those who were very ill) were put on cattle cars and taken on a long, freezing trip up into the mountains to Trondheim. Farmers came to try to give them milk and food. Schoolchildren stood in the railroad stations singing as the cars went through.

The teachers were taken finally to Trondheim and put on a ship that was so overcrowded that the fascist doctor who was there perfunctorily to sign the certificate that everything was safe, refused to sign, and protested about conditions. The ship went off anyway. It was a dangerous passage that took twelve to fourteen days going up the jagged coast of Norway, through passages and past islands, in mined waters, blackouts with lighthouses not working. They finally, amazingly enough, reached Kirkenes far above the Arctic Circle. Here they were used as labor to unload German ships. They were housed in temporary shelters with cardboard

**“You teachers! You have destroyed everything for me!”**

walls. Some of the German guards showed them how to steal straw from the haystack nearby so that the officers wouldn’t know they’d got it, so they’d have some bedding.

In the meantime, the teachers who had not been arrested were ordered to return to school. They returned, and announced to their classes that they would not regard themselves as members of the new teachers’ organization. But the teachers were worried by rumors. They heard that one in ten of the teachers who had been arrested would be shot, or that they would be sent out to clear mine fields by walking through them. People have different feelings about risking someone else’s life than their own. And some of the teachers who heard these rumors were married to the men whose lives were threatened.

I sat one time, a few years ago, in the home of two of these teachers. The principal of their school was ready to give in, they told me, on grounds that he’d risk his own life but not theirs. “We’ve made our protest,” he said. “We’ve made the point.” But my friend told me that the women got together and told him not to give in. “We’ll take the risk,” they said.

At one point in the struggle Quisling was so furious he went out to Stabekk (where I lived for a couple of years). He brought some of his main officials with him, including his secret police, all in their fancy uniforms. He ranted and raved and screamed at the teachers in the school at Stabekk, so loud that out in the schoolyard people could hear every word that was said. He ended: “You teachers! You have destroyed everything for me!”

His words were heard in all the mountains and valleys and fjords of Norway.

Finally, it was announced that the teacher’s organization had not come into being. The teachers

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were brought home where they were celebrated as great heroes. The schools were never used for Nazi indoctrination. And after Quisling unsuccessfully attempted similar antics with other professions, trying to found organizations for a new corporate state, *finally Hitler personally intervened and ordered him to stop this nonsense.*

Have you ever heard someone argue, “We’ve tried war. We know that’s bad. Now let’s try nonviolence. It’s never been tried. It’s worth a try.” Nonsense. There is a vast history of this type of action going back as far as we have records. But most of it was probably never written down, and what was recorded has never been gathered together and mostly lies ignored, for all kinds of reasons.

## The Plebeians, 494 BC

Back in 494 BC the Plebeians were having a civil rights problem. They didn’t have representation in the Senate. The Plebeians were the people who did all the work in Rome, and the Patricians were the ones who made all the decisions and rather than work had people wait on them. So the Plebeians said, “All right, fine.” One day they got up and did like Moses did. They had a walkout. They went out, up onto a mountain in Crustumeria, which later became known as the “Sacred Mount,” and probably said to themselves, “Fine, we’ll go up here and set up camp and if things don’t work out, we’ll establish our own city. We know how to run a city; we’re the ones who’ve been doing all the work.” Suddenly the Senate discovered that there was really more validity in these very modest claims that these people were making than the Senators had fully been able to express earlier. Changes were promised, but the Senators broke their promises after the Plebeians came back. Things didn’t go too well until much later.

It was in 258 BC when the army—made up mostly of Plebeians, of course—came back from a war to find proposals for reform and civil rights bogged down in the Senate. So the Army got up and walked out, up to that same mountain, to establish a Plebeian city. The Senate took immediate action on the reforms.

## American Colonial Nonviolence, Circa 1776

This type of struggle has taken place throughout most of history. We don’t know even what exists in recorded scattered accounts because people have never searched them all out. We know this was a major part of the struggle in the Netherlands against Spanish rule and Catholic domination in the 16th century. We know there are instances of tax refusal in the Norwegian mountains in the 13th and 14th centuries; sometimes they got a little carried away, and there were a few tax collectors who didn’t live through it; but basically they were conducting tax refusal as a vehicle of resistance. One Norwegian historian claims that the reason the big Viking raids against foreign countries finally stopped was that people finally decided they’d had enough of these wars and declined to provide the necessary assistance in men, money and supplies.

In the 18th century, here in this part of North America, the European settlers used a great deal of violence against indigenous Americans, and then against the Africans who were imported. Nevertheless, the European settlers conducted major campaigns of nonviolent struggle against English controls, particularly for the ten-year period from 1765 to 1775. This was on a scale and significance that may require, when it is more fully researched, a major reinterpretation of American history,

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which may lead to a reassessment of the relevance and importance of the War of Independence.

There were three separate campaigns, each of which involved economic resistance. It is possible that this is the first major case of international economic sanctions on record.

Daniel Dulany, in the pamphlet he wrote on resistance to the Stamp Act in October of 1765, describes certain basic characteristics of political nonviolent struggle. (Now you'll notice I'm discussing on the political level, not on the religious or moral level.) Dulany said, "Instead of moping and whining to excite compassion, in such a situation we ought with spirit and vigor and alacrity to bid defiance to tyranny by exposing its impotence, by making it as contemptible as it would be detestable." Here is the fundamental conception that you can make tyranny helpless by refusing cooperation with it. So he advocated building up economic production within the colonies to make them self-reliant. They could then sever trade relations with England, which would hurt the English merchants, and consequently this would put leverage on the English government to repeal the Stamp Act.

## George Washington, Nonviolent Strategist

Did you ever think of George Washington as a nonviolent strategist? During this Stamp Act struggle courts were required to use stamps on official documents. The colonists had decided not to use the stamps. So the question became: "Do the courts remain open without using the stamps, or do the courts close down?" This was in the context of colonists conducting a massive campaign to refuse to pay debts they owed to the English merchants from whom the colonial merchants had purchased their products on credit. Walpole

regarded this as the most effective weapon that the colonists wielded. So George Washington advised that they should close down the courts, of course. Obeying the law was impossible. You close the courts, Washington reasoned, because if you close the courts, the courts cannot be used in an effort to collect the money that the colonists were refusing to pay to the English merchants. Therefore, the English merchants would put pressure on their government to repeal the Stamp Act. Very sophisticated nonviolent strategy, calculating effects and counter-effects of specific types of non-cooperation.

## Thomas Jefferson, Faster

Did you know that Thomas Jefferson with his colleagues introduced fasting in the colonial struggle? When the spirit of the resistance was weakening at certain points and people were getting bored, he and his friends (who were known rather as playboys, always going out and dancing) got the very respected and staid chaplain of the Virginia House of Burgesses to propose as his own idea a day of fasting and prayer—for political resistance. It was passed by the House of Burgesses and all of Virginia had a day of fasting and prayer—for political resistance. It wasn't Gandhi who introduced fasting as a political weapon at all.

Later during 1765, Governor Bernard of Massachusetts Bay said: "*At this time I have no real authority in this place.*" And Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson of Massachusetts Bay said: "*In the capital towns of several of the colonies and of this in particular, the authority is in the populace. No law can be carried into execution against their minds.*" There were cases—significant cases—of the burning of buildings and destruction of property during the Stamp Act resistance. Men who had accepted appointments as stamp distributors

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were threatened with physical attack and even death and run out of town. *But not one person was killed.*

During the Townshend resistance in January 1769, a London newspaper reported that because of the refusal of taxes and the refusal to import British goods, only 3,500 pounds sterling of revenue had been produced in the colonies. The American non-importation and non-consumption campaign was estimated by the same newspaper at that point to have cost British business not a mere 3,500 pounds but 7,250,000 pounds in lost income. Those figures may not have been accurate, but they are significant of the perceptions of the time. The attempt to collect the tax against that kind of opposition was not worth the effort, and the futility of trying eventually became apparent.

As the American movement developed, a radical fringe began to talk the rhetoric of violence. The militias, which the colonies had had for many, many decades, were deliberately developed. Some people began to foresee the movement shifting over to war. But this was not universal, and not preferred by even many radicals. The Suffolk Resolves, passed by the delegates of Suffolk County of Massachusetts Bay in 1774, recognized that violence was possible and the colonists should be ready for violence if it came. However, they recommended instead a different type of struggle—like they had been using: *“We would heartily recommend to all persons of this community not to engage in any routs, riots or licentious attacks upon the properties of any persons whatsoever, as being subversive of all order and government; but, by a steady, manly, uniform, and persevering opposition, to convince our enemies that in a contest so important—in a cause so solemn, our conduct shall be such as to merit the approbation of the wise, and the*

*admiration of the brave and free of every age and of every country.”*

On the basis of such thought and the Virginia Association, the First Continental Congress developed a sophisticated, phased program of economic and political non-cooperation. First, it began with a non-importation campaign, to be followed, if necessary, by a non-exportation campaign. The First Continental Congress program of resistance was called the “Continental Association.” It was a program of nonviolent resistance and the First Continental Congress was a non-violent resistance organization. It was a program implemented throughout the colonies, so well developed, so sophisticated, that its equal was probably not seen until Gandhi’s work in India. Going along with this was a program of enforce-

ment of these provisions in the colonies with such complete solidarity that the very enforcement organizations in many cases gradually became instruments of local government. Development of parallel governmental institutions also occurred on a colony-wide basis, sometimes

in deliberate defiance of British-appointed governors. It has been estimated that in nine or ten of the thirteen colonies, British governmental power had already been effectively and illegally replaced by substitute governments *before* Lexington and Concord. The Continental Congress was known as “the Congress.” Its measures of resistance were known as “laws.” British power had de facto collapsed in most of the colonies *before a shot was fired*. In Maryland, for example, an entire substitute government had taken over.

At the same time, there was significant support in England for the movement (though not as strong as during the Stamp Act resistance). The extent of the support, and the reasoning for it, should be researched and analyzed. Part of the Conti-

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mental Association (the program of resistance of the Continental Congress) contained this phrase: *“...we are of the opinion that a non-importation, non-consumption and non-exportation agreement, faithfully adhered to, will prove the most speedy, effectual, and peaceable measure...”*

Considering the de facto independence of most of the colonies by 1775, with the emergence of an inter-colonial confederation-type of government, and the experience in the Stamp Act struggles and the Townshend resistance, it is very possible that British power might have totally collapsed de jure short of the eight years that it took for the War of Independence. Rather than the war having speeded up independence, it may very well have postponed it.

Governor Dunmore of Virginia suggested that the “laws of Congress,” as he put it, receive from Virginians *“Marks of reverence they never bestowed on their legal Government, or the laws proceeding from it.”* He added: *“I have discovered no incidence where the interposition of Government, in the feeble state to which it is reduced, could serve any other purpose than to suffer the disgrace of a disappointment, and thereby afford matter of great exultation to its enemies and increase their influence over the minds of the people.”*

And in Massachusetts, already in early 1774, the Governor—Governor Gage—wrote, *“All legislative, as well as all executive power, is gone...”* Governor Gage made a similar report later in the year. So we must remember that, disregarded as it is in present portrayals of America’s Revolution, the American colonials, too, have a highly important place in the history of nonviolent struggle.

## Civilian-based Defense, Past and Present

This type of struggle—illustrated by these various examples—has even been used for national defense purposes. There is the example of the Ruhr struggle in 1923, which Germany waged against a French and Belgian occupation, with no preparation and no training. The results were mixed—some say it was a total failure, others, a success. The actual scorecard, I think, indicates at least a draw. National defense by nonviolent resistance was also attempted in Czechoslovakia in 1968, again with no training and no preparations. They managed there to get the Dubček group, which had been kidnapped and arrested, restored to their positions in the party and government where, despite serious compromises, they managed to remain for eight months. Even after the Husák regime came in, the Russians did not have complete control. The Russians reportedly expected Czechoslovak military resistance, which they thought they could successfully crush in four days, then install a puppet government and get out. Four days with a prepared Czech military—eight months when confronted with unprepared nonviolent resistance. This suggests a power potential to nonviolent struggle, if refined and prepared, which may be greater than that of violent means.

Now what is the condition of the “peace movement,” and how is all this relevant? Let us try to look at the “peace movement” not simply in the perspective of the period of Vietnam, but in the perspective of “peace movements” since they began to exist as organized entities, which certainly goes back at least to the 19th century.

The objective of peace organizations, originally at least, was to abolish war. It is doubtful that you will find that objective very clearly stated in the current programs as an achievable objective, with-

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in the foreseeable future, of any present American or foreign peace organization.

This is very instructive. Peace groups have been willing to settle for things far short of abolishing war: witnessing to one's piety and purity—and the stupidity of everybody else; witnessing to being a “holy remnant” or the only sane people around; struggling for the rights of conscientious objectors to war. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with any of these things. The point is not that. But they serve as substitutes for serious efforts to abolish war as such. Peace groups oppose a particular war and try to speed up its end with no confidence whatsoever that, even if successful, the military systems will thereby be weaker. Peace groups oppose the development of a particular weapon or a particular piece of technology—without that necessarily being a vehicle for reversing the whole dependence upon military hardware and military weapons. Or advocates of peace support giving all of the world's weapons to one government—a world government—or support the army of the other side—and call that anti-war activity! Or peace workers support universal negotiated disarmament when there is no historical evidence that that has ever worked or ever will. Or peace workers settle for some measures of arms control and arms regulation which—although they may help and may prevent a particular outbreak, or destruction, or attack under certain circumstances—can easily be broken and leave the military system more or less as it is.

Where is there a peace organization that really expects, in something less than a few hundred or a few thousand years, war is going to be removed from human society? There is no chance of a major popular uprising against war—as even I (with all of my cynicism) thought might be thinkable in the 1950's. At that point there were still people for whom nuclear weapons and intercontinen-

tal rocketry were new and therefore shocking. There was still moral indignation about it. But now whole generations have grown up in which nuclear weaponry is just part of the world, like mountains and rivers, cities and poverty. There is no fresh thinking among peace groups. There is no effective challenging of the political assumptions that underlie the war system itself. One hears that the war system is all wicked. Peace groups imply that to get rid of war, one has to

change whole generations and the way people are brought up. These may be wonderful things to do, but it implies that it is not possible to get rid of war until then. Others argue we must first have social revolution—ignoring the fact that wars existed for centuries before capitalism, and ignoring the fact that so-called socialist countries attack and invade each other, and that following most “revolutions” the military system is often more powerful than under the old regime.

## Human Nature, No Less than Animal

Yet human nature may provide other clues. You all have done various things in your lives you don't tell everybody about. When you were a little screaming brat, you got mad at mommy and daddy. “I'm not going to eat!” You engaged in a “hunger strike.” Or, if mommy or daddy were going to wallop you on the bottom and they hadn't touched you yet and whoever was your defender in the family was in the other room, you started screaming like mad, lying on the floor as if you had been slaughtered. And they hadn't even touched you! You were appealing to “martyrdom” and sympathy against the persecution of a poor, nonviolent, helpless person! Or you wouldn't take out the garbage, at least not on time. This was a refuse worker's strike. Or you wouldn't clean up your room until someone was standing there: “Now take that and put that in that drawer...” That is “non-obedience without

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direct supervision” or “slow and reluctant compliance.” Or you wouldn’t study when you went to school. You’d look out the window, daydream or even sleep in class.

Many animals and pets do all these things. Haven’t you had dogs or cats act this way? They want to go with you in the car somewhere—when they know they are not supposed to—they go and jump right in. It’s a “sit-in.” Or, they know very well what you’re saying to them and pretend they don’t, just like you’ve done yourself. Or you say “move,” and they lie down, whimpering, and look up at you with the saddest possible look—like some demonstrators do to police. Sometimes they’re being ignored, particularly if there’s company coming and there’s a big fuss in the house and nobody’s paying attention to them when they’re trying to say, “Come and play with me.” The dog then goes into the middle of the living room rug and does a “nonviolent intervention”—not biting anybody, not growling at anybody—but getting attention! So we don’t have to change human nature—or even animal nature—in order to be nonviolent. We can be the same stubborn, obnoxious people we’ve always been, under the guise of our halos and piety, while accomplishing things collectively that have a political objective. We can draw upon the experiences of other people in other situations. We don’t have to convert people to a new religious revelation, or worry about the sensitivity of our souls. That’s all nonsense on the political and social level.

The focus here is on a very simple question. It isn’t: how do we change all of society? It isn’t even: how do we create the perfect nonviolent society of the future? It is simply: *how do we get rid of major political violence, including war?*

Nobody who has tried to get rid of war has succeeded. What we do is go on repeating the same

things year after year, decade after decade. You read this and that report, change a few words, and it’s the same story and the same methods that were used way back—with no evidence that they had the kind of effects that are sought this time. People try to choose between one of the bankrupt political ideologies and another one. It’s ludicrous. If we’ve not been able to solve a problem, maybe the humility that we talk about so often and so smugly should be rooted in the awareness of our ignorance and our failure. Nehru was one of the people who said that to solve a problem, you must first understand it. Maybe we have wars because we’re wicked. Maybe we have wars because of a particular economic system developed two hundred years or so ago. Maybe we have wars because there’s not a world government. Maybe we have wars because we (or somebody), in certain situations, feel that there are certain things for which we need to conduct a struggle—sometimes for

good purposes, sometimes for bad purposes. And if someone is conducting a struggle for bad purposes, if you’re not going to surrender to them, you have to be able to struggle against them for a good purpose.

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Most people have been totally unaware of the history of struggle without violence. Thus, every time they have engaged in nonviolent struggle, people have had to improvise anew. *Suppose that had been the case with war.* Suppose no armies had been organized. Nobody had studied military strategy and tactics. Nobody had tried to invent new weapons or even develop training in the use of existing weapons. There were no West Points. Then the Martians and the Eskimos formed an alliance to conquer all the terrible Southerners who had destroyed their way of life. President Ford would go on television and declare: “*We’re going to be invaded from the North. Now you all remember we have experience in fighting with violence. You remember all those times in the kitchen when you*

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*threw things at each other, all those barroom brawls that you've had, and all the feuds you've heard about beginning with the Hatfields and the McCoy's. Now, with true spontaneity and creativity and with that freshness without regimentation that makes it effective, get out there and fight the invasion from the North."*

Ludicrous!

That's the situation nonviolent struggle has always been in—even against the Nazis. It's amazing it hasn't been wiped off the earth. The explanation must be that there is something very powerful in this technique, so that even when improvised, even when facing an organized terroristic Nazi system, even when confronting one powerful government or another, it has somehow, in many situations, prevailed. But peace workers have often talked nonsense: "Nonviolent means should be used, even if they don't succeed, because it's right to be nonviolent." But if nonviolent struggle has been able to prevail despite highly unfavorable circumstances, it's possible that nonviolent struggle has a power potential many times greater than violence and war. This is possible because it is based—among other things—upon a more accurate perception of the nature of power as deriving from people and ultimately dependent on people.

If we take all this past human experience in nonviolent forms of struggle that have been improvised, and we study and research them and try to learn how to refine and develop them to make them more effective than they have ever been, we won't have to argue *against* violence and war. If *nonviolent* struggle can be shown to be so much more *effective*, then people will *want* to use it. After all, war isn't that effective. In every case at least one side loses, which is only fifty percent effective

if you're lucky. The winner pays a very large price as well. Nonviolent struggle has the potential for building a solution to the problem. We have primitive prototypes of nonviolent defense policy, or civilian-based defense policy, as it is preferably called. We have the experience in the use of this technique in revolution against dictatorships. Civilian struggle has been used in struggles for reform, and in land redistribution instead of guerrilla warfare.

Remember 1939 and planning work for creating an atomic bomb? Realistic? Who would have believed that you could take these tiny things that you couldn't even see called atoms and somehow put them together to make a more powerful explosive than had ever existed? An insane idea? And yet research money was put into that, although nobody had made a miniature

atom bomb in a chemistry set in the basement and gone out and blown up the neighbor's garage with it. Yet we have, in actual human experience, clear examples of nonviolent struggle by ordinary people. This is what destroyed the Czarist system in Russia in the February 1917 Revolution; it wasn't the Bolsheviks. It was the workers demonstrating in the streets, the soldiers getting sick of shooting them down, throwing down their guns and walking out to join them.

Throughout history we have overlooked or deprecated the crucial role of nonviolent struggle. It is hardly ever presented in terms to evoke a response in people who read about it. But there is a vast, long history of this undeveloped, crude political technique that has used a myriad of nonviolent weapons: economic boycotts, sit-ins, civil disobedience, protest marches, mutiny, parallel government—about two hundred different methods, capable not only of converting opponents but,

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more importantly, of destroying the power of a dictator.

The question isn't—as some pacifists have asked—whether one is able to love a Hitler. The question is, are we capable of *destroying* a Nazi system by nonviolent struggle. If one argues that we have to wait until every last human being is capable of loving a Hitler before we can get rid of war, it's either spiritual arrogance or political bankruptcy. The problem is how on earth do you fight tyranny? How do you prevent and defeat genocide, whoever attempts to commit it? Unless we answer that question in the worst racist situations, people are not going to give up war.

With this view of the nature of the problem of war, and the existence of nonviolent alternatives, we need a variety of things. First and foremost is research, so we know what we are talking about, and so other people will respect what we have to say, and respect the product of that research. That involves people participating in the research who hold widely diverse beliefs, and are skeptical of nonviolent alternatives. We need to establish a research institute under the most prestigious possible auspices, with proper funding, to investigate nonviolent struggle, substitute national defense policies, genocide, political violence, and a variety of such things that relate to political structure, from dictatorship to the weaknesses of dictatorship to the nature and structure of participatory democracy. That type of a research program should be accompanied by efforts to inform the general public of the potentials of nonviolent alternatives in the most severe political conflicts. Television plays could be built around actual historical cases. There would also be more serious public education, including courses in colleges and universities. Such material on nonviolent alternatives would be included in regular history books.

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We should look forward to the time when we can establish a new national priority: a ten-year crash program of research and evaluation of whether we can develop an effective nonviolent substitute for war that would provide real defense. This could be undertaken for a mere one percent of the Penta-

gon budget for a year, every dollar of which could be very usefully spent. Either the nonviolent stuff that peace advocates have believed in is utter nonsense (which most pacifists will go on believing anyhow, irrespective of

all the evidence against it, so the research won't harm it) or, as I suspect, the research will substantiate many of the claims about the potential of nonviolent means. Even the most informed advocates of nonviolent alternatives may repeatedly have their minds blown at the continuing revelations of the potential that nonviolent struggle has already demonstrated—and the discovery of what it is capable of becoming. The abolition of war does not require anti-war, anti-military lobbies or demonstrations and protest, *but the development of effective nonviolent alternatives to military struggle.*

Even now, with our limited knowledge and before the kind of research we need has been undertaken, it has been possible to involve military officers and strategists in serious discussions of nonviolent strategies as a substitute for military defense in several countries, including the United States. That monster book of mine—*The Politics of Non-violence*—has had several of its most perceptive and favorable reviews in American and foreign military journals. That's one or two more than I can say for peace journals. The book has been discussed seriously in Austria, where the Austrian military journal carried a long, two-part article by the editor-in-chief on the nature of nonviolent resistance as national defense. In Sweden, it is official policy of the government and the Defense Ministry to research and investigate civilian-based

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defense, with a view to *adding* it to the predominantly military defense policy they have now.

The view that there is only limited constituency from the peace movement that would take non-violent alternatives seriously is idiocy. That view is a reflection of the incapacity of the peace organizations' perceptions, dreams, and programs. Why can't we, in an age in which military people know how little military means can really accomplish, convince them of alternatives? What about the conservatives, who distrust big power in Washington, much of which is military—why can't we convince them? Why can't we develop substitutes for violence that can be used in the most dangerous and extreme situations? And we can do that out of more than loyalty to Dr. King or Gandhi. Gandhi drew much of his insight from African resistance in South Africa, from the Chinese use of economic boycotts, from the Russian 1905 revolution, from ecclesiastical disobedience in England, from peasant resistance in Ireland—all this long before he was regarded as a great Mahatma.

The point is, this nonviolent struggle is harmonious with what we crudely call "human nature."

Civilian struggles have occurred throughout history. We don't have to carry out vast sweeping changes that take decades or generations before we can eliminate major political violence. In dozens and hundreds of significant conflicts, including international ones, in ignorance and with improvisation, nonviolent struggle has already taken the place of military violence. The only question is, can we improve it and make it more effective? Can we provide the necessary vehicles and stimuli and resources to speed up the changeover? *Can civilian struggle be made a realistic choice for ordinary people (who don't really like war anyhow) and for professional soldiers (many of whom hate war because they have seen it first-hand) and for politicians (who often want these kinds of things too)?* Pacifists and other peace workers are so used to being a minority that they have no idea how many people are ready to join in a search for a substitute form of defense and struggle. But when we see that the basis of an alternative and the readiness of people to explore it are there, then the potential of what is possible to accomplish has been changed. It becomes possible once again to dream the dream of the abolition of war—but this time on the basis of realism and substance.