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# Nonviolent Sanctions

News from the Albert Einstein Institution

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## The Importance of Strategic Planning in Nonviolent Struggle

by Gene Sharp

**T**he use of strategy is best known in military conflict. For centuries military officers have engaged in strategic planning for military campaigns, and important thinkers such as Sun Tzu, Clausewitz, and Liddell Hart have analyzed and refined military strategy. In conventional military warfare and in guerrilla warfare, the use of sophisticated strategy is a basic requirement for effectiveness.

Just as effective military struggle requires wise strategies, planning, and implementation, nonviolent action will be most effective when it also operates on the basis of sound strategic planning. The formulation and adoption of wise strategies can greatly increase the power of nonviolent struggle.

### The Importance of Strategy

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. That means having a strategic plan which is designed to move from the present (in which the goal is not achieved) to the future (in which it is achieved). Strategy pertains to charting the course of action which makes it most likely to get from the present to a desired situation in the future.

For example, if one wants to travel from one place to another, one needs to plan in advance how to do so. Will one walk? Take a train? Drive a car? Fly? Even then the plan is far from complete. Does one have the money to pay for the cost of the trip and other expenses? If the trip is a long one, where will one sleep and eat? Are travel documents, passports, or visas

required, and if so how will one obtain them? Are there matters to be arranged to cover one's absence during the trip?

This type of thinking and planning, which some individuals undertake for ordinary purposes in daily life, should be undertaken by leaders of social and political movements. Unfortunately, however, strategic planning is rarely given the attention it deserves within such movements.

Some people naively think that if they simply assert their goal strongly and firmly enough, long enough, it will somehow come to pass. Others assume that if they remain true to their principles and ideals and witness to them in the face

of adversity, then they are doing all they can to help to achieve them. Assertion of desirable goals and remaining loyal to ideals are admirable, but are in themselves grossly inadequate to change the status quo and bring into being designated goals.

Of course, seeking to change a society, or to prevent changes in a society, or to remove a foreign occupation, or to defend a society from attack, are all far more complicated tasks than planning a trip. Yet only rarely do people seeking such objectives fully recognize the extreme importance of preparing a comprehensive strategic plan before they act.

Very often in social and political

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## Civilian-Based Defense Policy Presented in Taiwan Lectures

**C**ivilian-based defense received a modest but significant push toward consideration in Taiwan last December during a two-week lecture trip by Gene Sharp. It was the first major presentation of the civilian-based defense policy in Taiwan. The lecture trip was timed to coincide with the publication of the Mandarin Chinese language edition of Sharp's *Civilian-Based Defense*.

The lecture trip was organized at the initiative of Professor Albert Lin of Canada with the cooperation of Dr. Shane Lee of the independent Taiwan Congressional Office. About twenty organizations joined together to sponsor the trip.

Sharp gave public lectures in Taipei at Taiwan Normal University, as well as in the southern cities of Taichung, Tainan, and Kaohsiung. He addressed some sixty-five high-ranking military officers at the

War College of the National Defense University. And he participated in a "Public Hearing" sponsored by the Democratic Progressive Party and held in the legislative *Yuan* building.

Gene Sharp and Albert Lin were guests on an English-language radio call-in show on International Community Radio Taipei. There was also newspaper and television coverage of the visit.

Commenting on the trip, Professor Lin wrote that it was "an eye-opener, thought provoking and challenging to many of the people there. The important seeds have been scattered or set into the ground in Taiwan." He added that he hoped that "more people will be sensitive and serious enough to study the potential of civilian-based defense in general and for the urgent concern of the national security of Taiwan in particular." ■

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# Teaching about Nonviolent Action

by Ronald M. McCarthy

As a college student, it was my good fortune that the course in which I first encountered the idea of nonviolent action happened to be in Gene Sharp's classroom. Since then, I have been trying to find my own way into this subject, as a researcher, a teacher, and a facilitator of other people's research through my work with the Einstein Institution Fellows Program.

It is rare for a college or university course to be devoted entirely to nonviolent action. Rather, nonviolent action is usually one topic of several in a course on social movements or conflict studies. In that environment, it is important to state as clearly as possible that nonviolent action is itself a topic worth understanding and studying. Indeed, it is particularly important to point out that the strategy of nonviolent action can have distinctive effects on the processes and outcomes of the movements we study.

By nonviolent action, I mean the technique of nonviolent struggle, in contrast to the philosophy or ethic of nonviolence. The fortunate instructor will have students who bring their own ideas about the philosophical and ethical issues that are raised by the idea of nonviolent action. Also, students bring to the classroom their own interests and experiences in the struggles that are shaping contemporary society.

## Teaching Objectives

There are four objectives in teaching about nonviolent action: (1) to increase students' general knowledge of nonviolent action, (2) to help students develop skills of analysis and criticism; (3) to give students direct research experience specifically on this topic; and (4) to help students understand the applications of what they are learning.

The first objective can best be approached by considering the typical processes that take place in conflict and the particular place that nonviolent action holds in those processes. Sociologists, like myself, often begin from the standpoint that social movements and collective action are the framework for learning

about nonviolent action, but I think that a more fruitful point of departure is the idea that nonviolent action is a strategic choice in contentious conflict. From this viewpoint, students come to recognize the strategy of nonviolent struggle as a constrained choice: constrained, because some other party has an influence over the achievement of one's aspirations, and choice, because it involves that selection of means to an end whose determination may not be very clear. (*Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate, and Settlement* by Jeffrey Z. Rubin, Dean G. Pruitt, and Sung Hee Kim is an excellent text on the nature of conflict and strategic choice, processes of escalation and intensification, and how "contentious tactics" are used.)

This is the framework, but learning ought also to reach toward a sense of the history and ethnography of nonviolent action. If we define nonviolent struggle operationally by the use of the methods of nonviolent action in conflict—and if this is what we base our observations on—then we discover that nonviolent action has been used with great frequency throughout world history. Yet, at the same time, the ways in which objectives and issues are framed, the strategic sense that actors develop, and the repertoires of struggle vary greatly. Thus, it is not simply the incidence or rates of nonviolent action we want to stress, but the variety of human sensibilities that have led to its discovery and rediscovery in many cultural traditions.

Skills of analysis and criticism are as important in a course on nonviolent action as in any course, but with an added emphasis that much is yet to be discovered about the nature and effects of nonviolent struggle. Students need to be encouraged to use and evaluate data critically, to understand and evaluate claims they encounter in the literature, and to understand and criticize the theories that they are presented with. Joan Bondurant's systematization of Gandhi's concept of satyagraha in *Conquest of Violence* is very useful in this task. Bondurant analyzes Gandhi's thought in order to develop a set of propositions representing the Gandhian concept of how

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# Program on Nonviolent Sanctions Merges with Cultural Survival Center

**T**he Program on Nonviolent Sanctions, which receives financial support from the Albert Einstein Institution, has now joined with the Cultural Survival Center, the research arm of Cultural Survival, a human rights organization, to run the Program on Nonviolent Sanctions and Cultural Survival (PNSCS) at Harvard University's Center for International Affairs. The expanded program will explore the potential of nonviolent direct action as a functional substitute for violence, especially for ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples facing oppression, genocide, or war.

The joint program is being directed by David Maybury-Lewis, professor of anthropology at Harvard University and founder of Cultural Survival. "The objective of the program," he says, "is to make the findings of our interdisciplinary

research part of the thinking of scholars and policy makers so that they incorporate nonviolent alternatives into their strategies for dealing with situations of conflict."

The idea of formal collaboration between the two organizations came after more than a year during which Doug Bond, director of the Program on Nonviolent Sanctions, and Ted Macdonald, director of the Cultural Survival Center, had been working closely together.

"The interaction between the two research units proved to be quite stimulating and complementary," Doug Bond explains. "The Cultural Survival Center's global expertise of unique cultural contexts and diverse peoples offers insights and in-depth knowledge about the worldwide cases of nonviolent direct action that the PANDA project tracks."

"Such a 'marriage' of complementary research perspectives and activities

conducted by competent scholars," Bond says, "is all too rare in the social sciences; but what makes this 'marriage' truly exciting for me is the congenial, collaborative spirit of the people in both organizations."

Doug Bond and Ted Macdonald have jointly assumed the responsibilities of associate directors in the expanded Program on Nonviolent Sanctions and Cultural Survival.

"We hope to see the PNSCS program solidly established at the Center for International Affairs and able to reach out to the intellectual and policy communities, both at Harvard and beyond," says Maybury-Lewis. "This is an ambitious task but one which I feel sure that the program can carry out. We have a small staff, but both PNS and CS have had long experience of doing a lot with a little, and seeking to influence both scholarship and policy by the quality of their research." ■

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## *Self-Reliant Defense* Published in Macedonian

**T**he Macedonian edition of *Self-Reliant Defense*, by Gene Sharp, was publicly launched at the University of Skopje on February 15, 1995.

Trajan Gocovski, the former minister of defense and a professor at the Institute for Civil Defense, introduced the book in a forty-minute address. He recommended the "very important book" as a resource for research and as a textbook for under-

graduate and postgraduate students. Some fifty university professors and tutors participated in the event, including representatives of the Institute for Civil Defense, Army Academy of Macedonia and Faculty of Security.

The book's translation and publication were initiated by the Balkans Peace Studies Center—Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje. It was published with the financial support of the Open Society Institute in

Macedonia.

The book has been distributed to numerous libraries as well as to individual scholars and public figures, including the president of the Republic of Macedonia, Kiro Gligorov, the minister of defense, and the minister of justice. Copies also have been given to radio, television, and newspaper journalists. The book has been featured on two radio programs and reviewed in the press. ■

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## AEI Staff Changes

**T**he Albert Einstein Institution has undergone two staff changes in recent months. Christopher Kruegler, the Institution's president for the past four years, stepped down from that position in January to become administrator of the Harvard Forest in Petersham, Massachusetts. The three thousand-acre Harvard Forest is a teaching and research department of Harvard University, with over fifty staff and research scientists

working on long-term ecological problems.

"I have wanted to manage a large interdisciplinary scientific enterprise for some time," said Kruegler. "This is a wonderful opportunity to do so."

On behalf of the AEI board of directors, Elizabeth Defeis expressed appreciation for Kruegler's fine work as president of the Institution and congratulated him on his new appointment. Gene Sharp also

offered personal thanks to Chris for his service to the Institution and his contribution to the field of nonviolent sanctions. In the interim, the board appointed Gene Sharp acting president.

In addition, the Institution's development assistant, Ray Pasciuto, has moved on to become development manager of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, Massachusetts Chapter.

We wish them both well in their new positions. ■

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# The Importance of Strategic Planning in Nonviolent Struggle

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movements, the individuals and groups involved recognize that they need to plan how they are to act, but do so only on a very limited, short-term, or tactical, basis. They do not attempt to formulate a broader, longer-term, or strategic plan of action. They may not see it to be necessary. They may at the time be unable to think and analyze in those terms. Or, they may allow themselves to be repeatedly distracted from their larger goal by focusing continually on small issues, repeatedly responding to the opponents' initiatives, and acting feverishly on short-term activities. They may not allocate time and energy to planning a strategy, or exploring several alternative strategies, which could guide their overall efforts toward achieving their goal.

Sometimes, too, it must be admitted, people do not attempt to chart a strategy to achieve their goal, because deep down they do not really believe that achieving their goal is possible. They see themselves as weak, as helpless victims of overpowering forces, so the best they can do, they believe, is to assert and witness, or even die, in the faith that they are right. Consequently, they do not attempt to think and plan strategically to accomplish their objective.

The result of such failures to plan strategically is that the chances of success are drastically reduced, and at times eliminated. One's strength is dissipated. One's actions are ineffective. Sacrifices are wasted and one's cause is not well served. The failure to plan strategically is likely to result in the failure to achieve one's objectives.

Without the formulation of a careful strategic plan of action,

- ❑ one's energy can be deflected to minor issues and applied ineffectively,
- ❑ opportunities for advancing one's cause will go unutilized
- ❑ the opponents' initiatives will determine the course of events,
- ❑ the weaknesses of one's own side will grow and have detrimental effects on the attempt to achieve the

goal, and

- ❑ the efforts to reach the goal will have very little chance of being successful.

On the contrary, the formulation and adoption of brilliant strategies increase the chances of success. Directed action in accordance with a strategic plan enables one to concentrate one's strengths and actions to move in a determined direction toward the desired goal. They can be focused to serve the main objectives and to aggravate the opponents' weaknesses. Casualties and

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other costs may be reduced and the sacrifices may serve the main goal more effectively. The chances of the nonviolent campaign succeeding are increased.

## Formulating Wise Strategies

The selection, or formulation, of a wise strategy requires:

- ❑ an accurate sense of the whole context in which the struggle is to be waged,
- ❑ identification of the nature of the difference between where one is and where one wants to be,
- ❑ assessment of the impediments to achieving the goal and the factors which may facilitate the task,
- ❑ assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of one's opponents, of one's own group, and of third parties which may assist or hinder the campaign,
- ❑ evaluation of the merits and limitations of several potential courses of action one might follow,

- ❑ selection of a viable course among existing options or the charting of a completely new one, and
- ❑ identification of an overall plan of action which determines what smaller (tactical) plans and specific methods of action should be used in pursuit of the main goal (i.e., what specific localized or shorter-term activities or steps should be taken to implement the overall strategic plan).

## Levels of Planning and Action

In developing a strategic plan one needs to understand that there are different levels of planning and action. At the highest level is grand strategy. Then there is strategy itself, followed by tactics and methods.

*Grand strategy* is the overall conception which serves to coordinate and direct all appropriate and available resources (economic, human, moral, political, organizational, etc.) of the nation or other group to attain its objectives in a conflict.

Grand strategy includes consideration of the rightness of the cause, assessment of other influences in the situation, and selection of the technique of action to be used (for example, nonviolent struggle, conventional politics, guerrilla warfare, or conventional warfare), how the objective will be achieved, and the long-term consequences.

Grand strategy sets the basic framework for the selection of more limited strategies for waging the struggle. Grand strategy also includes the allocation of general tasks to particular groups and the distribution of resources to them for use in the struggle.

*Strategy* is the conception of how best to achieve objectives in a conflict (violent or nonviolent). Strategy is concerned with whether, when, or how to fight, and how to achieve maximum effectiveness in order to gain certain ends. Strategy is the plan for the practical distribution, adaptation, and application of the available means to attain desired objectives.

Strategy may also include efforts to develop a strategic situation so advanta-

geous that it may bring success without open struggle. Applied to the struggle itself, strategy is the basic idea of how the campaign shall develop, and how its separate components shall be fitted together most advantageously to achieve its objectives.

Strategy involves consideration of the results likely to follow from particular actions; the development of a broad plan of actions; the skillful determination of the deployment of conflict groups in smaller actions; consideration of the requirements for success in the operation of the chosen technique; and making good use of success.

Strategy operates within the scope of grand strategy. Tactics and methods of action are used to implement the strategy. To be most effective, the tactics and methods must be chosen and applied so that they really assist the application of the strategy and contribute to achieving the requirements for success.

In formulating strategy in nonviolent struggle, the following aspects are to be taken into account: one's own objectives, resources, and strength; the opponents' objectives, resources, and strength; the actual and possible roles of third parties; the opponents' various possible courses and means of action; and one's own various possible courses and means of action—both offensive and defensive; the requirements for success with this technique, its dynamics of action, and its mechanisms of change.

A *tactic* is a limited plan of action, based on a conception of how best to utilize the available means of fighting to achieve a restricted objective as part of the wider strategy. A tactic is concerned with a limited course of action which fits within the broad strategy, just as a strategy fits within the grand strategy. A particular tactic can only be understood as part of the overall strategy of a battle or a campaign.

Tactics deal with how particular methods of action are applied, or how particular groups of combatants shall act in a specific situation. Tactics are applied for shorter periods of time than strategies, or in smaller areas (geographical, institutional, etc.), or by a more limited number of people, or for more limited objectives, or in some combination of these.

*Method* refers to the specific means of action within the technique of nonviolent struggle. These include dozens of particular

forms of action, such as the many kinds of strikes, boycotts, political noncooperation, and the like.

The development of a responsible and effective strategic plan for a nonviolent struggle depends upon the careful formulation and selection of grand strategy, strategies, tactics, and methods.

### **Some Key Elements of Nonviolent Strategy**

There is no single strategy for the use of nonviolent struggle that is appropriate for all occasions. Indeed, the technique of nonviolent action makes possible the development of a variety of strategies for meeting various types of conflict situations. Additionally,

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nonviolent struggle may often need to be combined in a grand strategy with the use of other means of action.

This does not mean that nonviolent struggle is compatible with all other techniques of action. For example, the use of violence along with nonviolent struggle destroys various of the processes by which nonviolent struggle operates, and thereby contributes to its ineffectiveness at best and its collapse or defeat at worst.

However, it is fairly obvious that such means as fact-finding, publicity, public education, appeals to the opponents, negotiations, and the like could beneficially in many situations be used in connection with the use of nonviolent struggle. These means are often used in connection with economic boycotts and labor strikes, for example.

Essential to the planning of nonviolent struggle campaigns is a basic principle: Plan your struggle so that the success of the conflict becomes possible by reliance on yourselves alone. This was Charles Stewart

Parnell's message to Irish peasants during a rent strike of 1879-1880: "rely on yourselves," and not on anyone else.

Assuming that a strong nonviolent struggle is planned and being waged, it is fine to seek limited and nonviolent assistance from others, but winning the struggle must depend on one's own group. Then, if no one else provides help, assuming that the strategic planning has been sound, one still has a chance to succeed. However, if the responsibility for success and failure has been given to others, when they do not come forward the struggle will fail. In any case, responsible external support is more likely to be forthcoming when a strong nonviolent struggle is being conducted by the aggrieved population, acting correctly as though success or failure will be determined by its efforts only.

The formulation of wise strategies and tactics for nonviolent struggles requires a thorough understanding of the dynamics and mechanisms of nonviolent struggle, such as is presented in *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*. It is necessary to be attentive to the selection of those plans and actions which facilitate their operation and to the need to reject those which if implemented would disrupt the very factors which can contribute to effectiveness. The most advanced study of strategy in nonviolent struggle is *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict*, by Peter Ackerman and Christopher Kruegler.

Attention will also be needed to such additional factors as psychological elements and morale, geographical and physical elements, timing, numbers and strength, the relation between the issue and the concentration of strength, the maintenance of the initiative, and the choice of specific methods of action which can contribute to achieving the objectives of the strategy and tactics.

The importance of strategic planning for nonviolent struggle cannot be overemphasized. It is the key to making social and political movements more effective. It may not guarantee that a movement will achieve its objectives, but it will certainly make the possibility of success more likely. ■

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# Teaching about Nonviolent Action

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satyagraha should be done. She then compares actual cases with the conceptual ideal, in a way that encourages students to adopt a critical stance rather than taking ideas on faith. I also want students to think further about how to theorize about nonviolent action and to learn something about how it works (i.e., methods, dynamics, mechanisms). What most distinguishes a course on nonviolent action from other courses is that it examines the question: "How does nonviolent action operate in acute conflicts?"

The third goal that I mentioned is research experience. One of the most difficult problems for students is defining a research question that will illuminate the role of nonviolent action as a technique of struggle. Students may be able to think clearly about social changes they would like to see take place, about their own convictions, and about social movements they have heard of and would like to know more about. But taking the next step, thinking about the dynamics of nonviolent action in a struggle related to those conflicts, is more difficult. Almost equally as important, students need to understand the structural context within which nonviolent action takes place. It is one thing to see nonviolent action as a course of events—a group comes together, it decides to protest, the protests do not work as hoped so a sit-in follows, and the conflict escalates further. But to understand the potential sources of support for a campaign, to identify the constituencies of a movement, and to see which groups might be adversaries of a nonviolent campaign takes a more informed analytical approach. Of course, there are also the other steps that are always part of research and must be performed well: collecting relevant data, assembling and assessing data, making a coherent argument about process, and assessing outcomes and the reasons for them.

The last goal in teaching about nonviolent action is to help students understand how their knowledge might apply in real-life contexts. Even middle-class students here in Massachusetts generally have some experience of serious community

conflict. Some, for example, live in communities where corporations want to site a factory or a large store in a rural area, where there are environmental and land-use disputes, ethnic or racial conflict, labor issues, and the like.

## Teaching Methods

With these goals in mind, I have developed some methods to encourage students to recognize for themselves the role of nonviolent struggle in the dynamics of conflict. Four exercises that I have found useful are a conflict brainstorming exercise, "find it in the newspaper," analysis of the strategies used in an actual case, and diagramming changes in a conflict.

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1. *Conflict brainstorming.* In this exercise, the instructor provides students with the details of an imaginary, or semi-imaginary, conflict that she or he has devised. There should be enough detail to capture students' imaginations, but not so much as to limit the ideas they can come up with. In my own classes, I often use the example of a large corporation that has purchased land for siting a waste-treatment plant in a rural town. The class divides into small groups to discuss several questions: what are the advantages and disadvantages for the community, what are the advantages and disadvantages for individuals, and what can be done about them? We start off by seeing that situations which are conflicts to some may well contain opportunities for others.

The basic rule of brainstorming—that participants must refrain from criticizing or replying to an idea until everyone has finished speaking—allows the groups to bring out a variety of ideas, which the instructor writes on the board when groups report their findings. When we turn to

discussing as a class what has come up, students begin to make connections on their own. First, they can see that the situation contains a mixture of advantages and dangers, and, second, that it also does not demand particular strategic choices. Indeed, for many people the avoidance of overt conflict is very likely. Third, the discussion can explore the links and implications of the many contentious methods that a good class will come up with to cope with the inherent conflict. Students will think of all sorts of contentious methods for pressing a group's case—such as picketing, or petition drives, or boycotts—and will begin to realize that these different methods have a good deal in common.

This exercise, best done quite early in a course, encourages students to begin to develop a comprehensive sense of the structure of conflict. First, students begin to understand the conflict field as a structure of interests and aspirations. Second, they begin to see that there are several ways to respond strategically to a conflict. Third, students begin to learn that there are a variety of actions that can impose a cost on adversaries who are unwilling to reconsider their position. And fourth, students begin to see that there are problems in choosing among different methods and approaches to conflict—that it is not necessarily a situation where you can mix and match any method or approach you want to. The instructor's contribution is to help them to see how all the individual examples that they have thought up cluster into different categories. Some of them are legal/political, some of them are violent or potentially violent, and some of them are nonviolent action. This sets the stage for the rest of the course, because it encourages students to think about why individuals or groups choose certain options over others in a conflict.

2. *Find it in the newspaper.* This is one of Chris Kruegler's classroom exercises, and it helps both with understanding the concept of methods of nonviolent action and with recognizing just how often people turn to nonviolent action as a resource in their conflicts. After introducing and discussing the methods of nonviolent action, Chris passes out *The New York Times*, or some other newspaper

that gives thorough coverage to world news, and asks them to locate all the references to these methods in the news. It will be a rare day in which a protest, strike, boycott, protest march, or other nonviolent method is completely absent.

3. *Strategy in the civil rights movement.* The video series “Eyes on the Prize” is often shown in classrooms, not just for its graphic and detailed depiction of the history of the civil rights movement but also because so much can be learned about movement insiders and their thinking. Likewise, instructors often assign Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham City Jail,” with its powerful defense of the 1963 campaign in Birmingham, Alabama. This exercise combines the two resources in order to compare three strategies used in the civil rights movement and, more broadly, to look at the general problem of strategy and the dynamics of struggle.

The earliest strategy of the movement depicted in this series was the use of litigation to challenge the legality of segregation and, once it was legally overturned, to engage the powers of government to desegregate institutions. This strategy led to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of 1955 and subsequently to court action requiring the desegregation of schools in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Court action, because it was resisted, led in turn to federal action to enforce the court’s orders. Although several graphic sequences in “Eyes on the Prize” depict the desegregation of public schools, I find that college students respond most strongly to the desegregation of the University of Mississippi in 1962. In this example, the Kennedy-era Justice Department attempts to enforce the registration of James Meredith, the African-American student entering this previously all-white university. The response of state and university authorities is simply to refuse to comply, and the struggle culminates with a night of violence directed at federal agents in the heart of the campus. In discussing these events, a class can see that the basic assumption of a political and legal strategy backed by state action is that sooner or later the adversary will obey the law of the land. When this does not happen, the courts and the government find themselves

using massive resources to carry out what seemed at first to be a fairly simple matter. The limits of litigation, in short, are reached when the adversary refuses compliance.

For comparison, we can turn to two examples of nonviolent struggle in the movement. In a subsequent episode of “Eyes on the Prize” viewers are introduced to the students at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee and the sit-ins of 1960. Viewers see students being trained in nonviolent action and proceeding to carry out the sit-ins, as well as violent attacks against the sit-ins and subsequent arrests. The episode shows quite carefully

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how segregationist violence led to divisions in the white community and also how the challenge to conscience raised by the students had its effect. In discussing this segment, a class can see how a carefully focused challenge by a relatively small, highly motivated group can bring about change. At the same time, the sit-ins were the actions, in a sense, of an elite—an approach which was not to be the strategy of choice for much of the rest of the movement.

A third segment of “Eyes on the Prize” details the strategy of mass action and disruption as it was conducted by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Birmingham, Alabama in the spring of 1963. Early on, viewers see the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., being placed under arrest and subsequently writing his “Letter from Birmingham City Jail.” Dr. King’s letter can be read in many ways—as a sermon, a prophetic challenge to create justice, or as a justification for mass

protest. When students read parts of the letter combined with watching the events of the Birmingham protests, Dr. King’s strategic vision comes out strongly. Early in his essay, he carefully explains the procedures that the movement has gone through—the “four steps” in preparing a campaign—to give its opponents every chance to negotiate. He explains that the nonviolent action which has followed operates so as to “create such a crisis and establish such creative tension” that negotiations must result. It is the strategy of the movement, Dr. King argues, to use marches, sit-ins, boycotts—as well as the city’s repressive response to them—“to create a situation so crisis-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation.” Far from keeping his intentions secret, Dr. King explains precisely what the movement intends to do!

Video coverage of the protest marches in “Eyes on the Prize” gives students the chance to test Dr. King’s words against the campaign’s actions. In particular, viewers see the end of the relative restraint shown by local police when the initiation of mass marches by schoolchildren raises the “tension” to new levels, filling the jails and straining the city’s resources beyond what it can bear. Perceptive students will also notice the gamble that the SCLC took by involving children in the struggle. They realize that strategic choice was much more complicated than it seemed when they had only read about it. Nowhere that I know of is the logic of a nonviolent strategy, and direct evidence of how that strategy is acted upon, so clearly displayed.

4. *Conflict mapping exercise.* When watching “Eyes on the Prize” and reading Dr. King’s letter, students begin to recognize that a strategy of nonviolent struggle does not merely polarize the parties, but also sets in motion changes in the very structure of the forces matched with each other. In particular, they see that a conflict or movement is not simply a matter of dualistic and opposing forces, but that nonviolent action works upon the contradictions within an apparently unitary party.

I ask students to divide the entire blackboard into three sections: the grievance groups, their adversaries, and  
*(Continued on p. 8)*

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# Teaching about Nonviolent Action

(Continued from p. 7)

the people in the middle. They diagram this structure at the beginning of the movement that they're studying (and the civil rights movement can be used once more as a resource), and then they diagram it again at some later point in the movement. They find that they can actually see the way in which certain constituencies are pulled into the conflict, crossing the line between those who are neutral or even hostile and those who come to support the nonviolent action group's demands. An example of this, again, is in "Eyes on the Prize," in the Nashville segment. There, we meet a local merchant who was not inclined to see the disruptive forces of the sit-in movement get their way. Once the sit-ins were attacked by segregationists and their violence began to disrupt the peace of the city, however, he tells us that he thought differently about the matter. This kind of evidence gives students a sense of the literal dynamics within a campaign and how nonviolent action affects the disposition of forces in the conflict field.

It is my intention that these exercises will be mutually reinforcing and support the readings for the course. *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, by Gene Sharp, is the basic resource, accompanied by Bondurant's book, perhaps, or Peter Ackerman and Christopher Kruegler's *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict* for a more advanced class.

My overall assessment is that the technique approach to nonviolent action stands up quite well in the classroom. But as a teacher of nonviolent action, I know that we need many more curricular

resources than we now have. There is no reason why an understanding of nonviolent action should not be required knowledge for someone who believes that they understand social movements, conflicts, and international politics. Yet it still receives marginal treatment in these subjects, and often under some other rubric (such as "repertoires" of struggle). If nonviolent action as technique and strategy is to be understood, along with the possibilities it brings for a transformation of conflicts in creative and affirmative directions, we need texts and resources. And we also must support the research, the hard thinking, and the sound conceptual development that will allow knowledge of nonviolent action to take its place in the critical thinking shaping the world today. ■

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