INFACT Claims Victory for GE Boycott

INFACT, the international corporate accountability group that won significant reforms in the marketing of infant formula through the Nestle Boycott in 1984, has claimed victory for its international boycott of the General Electric Co. (GE). On November 23, 1992, GE announced that it will get rid of its aerospace division, ending almost fifty years of leadership in the nuclear weapons industry. GE’s aerospace division includes work on the Trident II missile, Star Wars, nuclear submarines, and military satellites.

GE’s recent step caps the company’s steady decline in nuclear weapons work, which has been dropping consistently since 1986 when the consumer boycott was launched. In 1990, the company met INFACT’s first demand by announcing its plan to terminate a thirty-four year contract manufacturing the neutron trigger to every US hydrogen bomb. In addition, by 1991, GE’s revenues from nuclear weapons related work had dropped by forty-six percent since 1986. Finally, the company’s most recent announcement signals an end to GE’s remaining involvement in nuclear weapons work. INFACT will keep the pressure on GE until the company’s withdrawal from nuclear weapons production is completed.

“GE’s departure from the nuclear weapons industry will remove one of the most powerful corporations in the United States from its influential hold on nuclear weapons policy decisions,” said Elaine Lamy, executive director of INFACT.

“The largest Washington lobby of any nuclear weapons contractor, and with its influential ties to the White House, GE has been a real driving force for nuclear (Continued on p. 8)

Exploring Nonviolent Struggle in Thailand and Burma

By Gene Sharp

Editor’s Note: In two Southeast Asian countries, the same means—nonviolent action—is being considered for two very different objectives. In Burma, prodemocracy groups are studying ways nonviolent struggle could be used to bring down a brutal dictatorship. In Thailand, the government is debating the use of nonviolent civilian resistance to prevent future military coups.

Gene Sharp traveled to Thailand and Burma in the fall, October 20–November 8, 1992, in response to two invitations. INFACT, the international corporate accountability group that won significant reforms in the marketing of infant formula through the Nestle Boycott in 1984, has claimed victory for its international boycott of the General Electric Co. (GE). On November 23, 1992, GE announced that it will get rid of its aerospace division, ending almost fifty years of leadership in the nuclear weapons industry. GE’s aerospace division includes work on the Trident II missile, Star Wars, nuclear submarines, and military satellites.

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The entrance to the National League for Democracy section of Mannerplaw.

Mannerplaw, Burma

After two days rest and orientation in Bangkok, I traveled to Mannerplaw, a base camp for the Burmese democratic opposition located along the Thai-Burma border. It was about a ten-hour trip from Bangkok, involving two airplanes, private car, four-wheel-drive truck, and boat.

Mannerplaw was nothing like what I had imagined. While it has been a rebel political and military base for decades, the location and pace were like a quiet jungle village.

During my four days in Mannerplaw I participated in a variety of meetings and discussions about nonviolent struggle (or political defiance as it is more often called (Continued on p. 4)
A Reader Responds: A Dialogue with Arun Gandhi

To the Editor:

I read with considerable interest the article “Gandhi, Clausewitz, and the New World Order” in Nonviolent Sanctions (Spring/Summer 1992).

While I found Dr. Christopher Kruegler’s arguments well thought out there are some inaccuracies that need to be noted.

When Dr. Kruegler writes that the people of India joined Gandhi’s movement only because “[they] were not required to subscribe to the entire Gandhian universe of ideas. . . .” I think he is doing injustice to Gandhi and the people of India.

Many of Gandhi’s experiments with nonviolence, which some describe as idiosyncracies, were meant for his own understanding of Truth. At no time did he insist that everyone in India follow his ideals to the “T.” He believed each one of us has to arrive at our own understanding of our desires and limitations.

What compelled people to follow Gandhi was his transparent sincerity, his ability to lead from up front, his insistence on doing what he asked others to do, and his ability to find a cause that affected the largest number of people and was attainable.

The 1930 Salt March was not, as Dr. Kruegler says, the “Independence or Death” campaign. I presume Dr. Kruegler is referring to the “Do or Die” campaign that Gandhi launched in 1942 when he urged the Congress Party to pass the “Quit India” resolution. Until 1942 the Indian struggle was for Home Rule or some sort of arrangement where the British could also be party to the governance of India. It was in 1942 that they ultimately said complete independence was the goal.

I am not one of the “blind followers” of Gandhi or his philosophy because I believe that was not what he wanted his successors to become. However, I do believe in some absolutes in a nonviolent struggle which leads to its success. These are:

1. There is need for intensive planning and training of participants in the theory and practice of nonviolence.
2. There is often wisdom in launching campaigns in a graduating form so that the goals are attainable and people can be motivated by success.
3. It is necessary that participants develop a “Do or Die” mindset just as a soldier going to a conventional war does.
4. There is need for a layered structure of leadership that can take over and lead in the absence of the upper echelons of leaders.
5. It is essential that the struggle relates to something that affects the largest number of people.

The Congress Party in India was formed in 1885 by a British bureaucrat A.O. Hume because he felt the large number of Indian bourgeoisie returning home after an English education would need a platform to air their political and social grievances. These Indians came to be known as the “Brown Sahibs” because the only difference between them and the English was the color of their skin.

These Indian leaders launched many campaigns from 1885 to 1915 but could never get the masses to participate. When Gandhi came into the picture he related to the masses because he gave up his English habits and attire and became one with the commonest. It was not just showmanship but genuine compassion for the poor and the weak. That earned him greater respect and a following that became unprecedented in recent Indian history.

With good wishes.

Yours sincerely,

Arun Gandhi, Director
M.K. Gandhi Institute for the Study of Nonviolence,
Christian Brothers University,
Memphis, Tennessee

Christopher Kruegler replies:

Dear Dr. Gandhi,

I found much to agree with in your letter, and I certainly understand that blind obedience was not one of Gandhi’s expectations of others. My point in this connection is, I think, in perfect harmony with yours, except that we are expressing ourselves differently.

I was trying to say that the 1930–1931 Independence Movement (as a discrete campaign which cannot be reduced to the Salt related actions alone, but certainly includes them) was specifically identified by Gandhi and Congress as a campaign of nonviolent action, and not one of satyagraha. This distinction was made to enable the participation of patriotic Indians who might otherwise have been excluded, had the full and rigorous training and commitment of satyagrahis been required of them.

My argument is that this choice was a highly functional one for the Independence effort, because it had precisely the desired effect, mobilizing one of the biggest movements in history up to that time. This observation is not meant to imply that for the rest of the time Gandhi was a spiritual or political autocrat. But of course there were designated satyagraha campaigns at other junctures in which the discipline of that type of conflict was insisted upon, and rightly so.

We do have a factual disagreement about the “independence or death” issue. I believe I am correct in asserting that this slogan was, in fact, used on a number of occasions in the 1930–1931 struggle, both by Gandhi and other prominent leaders, such as Mrs. Sarojini Naidu. I refer to Mrs. Naidu’s statement, “I go to victory or death,” after Gandhi’s arrest and her assumption of leadership responsibilities for the raid on the Dharasana Salt Works.

Gandhi himself told the Associated Press that this would be the “final struggle for freedom,” (emphasis mine; 5 April 1930) and told his followers that “not a single believer in nonviolence should find himself free or alive at the end of the effort to submit any longer [sic] to slavery,” in “When I Am Arrested,” Young India 27 February 1930.

It is my contention that such statements carry the risk of arousing false expectations of a decisive encounter, which it may not be within the capacity of a struggle movement to produce. Such statements don’t allow for tactical withdrawal, but tend to attach what Boserup and Mack call “the odium of defeatism” to any strategic choice that does not escalate or finish the conflict.

If, therefore, you mean by calling a “do or die mindset” an absolute requirement of nonviolent struggle that tenacity and commitment are of the essence, I completely agree. But if you mean that there is no place in this form of conflict for
In its first protest action against the destruction of rainforests caused by the timber industry in the Brazilian Amazon, Greenpeace invaded and occupied one of the biggest mahogany sawmills in Rio Maria, Para State, in the southeastern Amazon on November 17, 1992.

The action, launching Greenpeace’s campaign against predatory logging in the Amazon, was aimed at the destructive exploitation of mahogany which is monopolized by twelve big sawmills in the state of Para.

The action began at sunrise when activists in white overalls entered the Maginco sawmill, Brazil’s biggest mahogany trading company. Maginco is owned by Danilo Remor who is also the president of the AIMEX (Association of Timber Exporters of Para and Amapa).

While protesters blocked the sawmill’s entrance, stopping trucks carrying logs, others chained themselves to the sawbench to prevent the cutting of the mahogany logs.

“This is only the beginning,” said Jose Augusto Padua, Greenpeace’s Latin American Campaigner for Tropical Forests. “We’re protesting against the predatory logging of mahogany which not only threatens the precious and endangered species, mahogany, but also creates the conditions for complete forest destruction. The logging of mahogany also leads to social and cultural dissolution of indigenous communities of the region.”

Mahogany loggers now operate with impunity in the Amazon, he said, making vast profits at the expense of the forest ecosystem and those who depend on intact forests.

Throughout much of the southern Amazon, mahogany cutters are the first to push roads into primary forests, providing access to cattle ranchers, gold miners, and displaced peasants who then clear the forest. “Wherever the mahogany loggers go, deforestation follows,” Padua said.

Greenpeace’s action was supported by representatives of the Nambikwara Indians who have been trying for years to stop mahogany loggers invading their territory.

Members of the rural workers’ union, including the president of the National Council of Rubber Tappers, also joined the action.

The town of Rio Maria, where the sawmill is located, has been the site of a number of union leader killings in the past few years related to the ownership of land. Cattle ranchers are pushing out poor landowners in order to expand their operations.

In Europe, Greenpeace is calling for a ban on the use of mahogany, asking companies not to trade mahogany, and requesting governments to restrict imports until the industry is regulated in Brazil in line with the demands of the Brazilian Coalition against Logging in the Amazon.

—Peace Media Service
forty years the Burmese have suffered the brutalities of the dictatorships of Ne Win and his colleagues. Burma is currently ruled by the SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council), a dictatorial military junta established in the aftermath of the brutal crushing of the 1988 nonviolent demonstrations for democracy. The SLORC regime continues to receive foreign military assistance (especially from China). Governments of neighboring countries refuse to take a strong stand against the SLORC dictatorship. The motives of these countries vary, but economic gain in Thailand from the clear cutting of virgin teak forests in Burma is one example. The military resistance of the democratic opposition has thus far failed to achieve its objectives. And, until recently, there has been very little understanding of the nature, requirements, and potential of nonviolent struggle.

I did, however, do such things as point to the diversity of the means available within nonviolent struggle. For example, instead of marching through the streets again and becoming easy targets (as in the shootings of 1988), everyone might stay home or otherwise indoors, and produce a silent city apparently with no people. I also suggested that as a part of basic planning they should identify the weaknesses of the dictatorship to determine if there were points at which resistance might usefully be concentrated. In addition, I recommended that they never attempt to gain an objective with nonviolent struggle when they lacked sufficient strength to succeed.
end of the course, students are expected to understand the insights into political power on which political defiance is based, and also to have developed an understanding of the technique’s multiple methods, its dynamics of conflict against a repressive regime, the mechanisms of change, and the principles of strategy in nonviolent struggle.

The aim is not to give instructions to students as to what should be done in a specific situation. Rather, the objective is to provide the students with basic knowledge, analysis, and strategic thinking so that (1) they can share these insights with others, and (2) when facing various specific situations they themselves can prepare strategic plans for the optimal type of action in which they can engage.

Helvey describes his role as that of an educator: “My point was, and is, that political defiance belongs to the Burmese prodemocracy movement. They have made all the decisions. It is their program—not mine. The only thing I have done is to expose them to the potential of nonviolent sanctions and showed that nonviolent sanctions can be planned and executed like any other kind of warfare. Nonviolent sanctions, like military struggle, is both an art and a science. To be effective, it must be studied and carried out with skill and discipline.” The dangers of incompetence include vast casualties, he continued. “Our responsibility rests with insuring they have the best information available to them so they can become skilled in the strategic application of nonviolent theory.”

Although I was familiar with Helvey’s course, I still anticipated significant skepticism about nonviolent struggle. After all, most if not all of these groups had been relying on military struggle for years or even decades. To my surprise, the Burmese leaders I met had been persuaded that political defiance was a powerful means of struggle that they should use. The combination of their realism concerning their military situation vis-à-vis the SLORC dictatorship (now with weaponry from China, Poland, and Yugoslavia) and the impact of Helvey’s course had convinced them.

At the time of my visit, most of the graduates of the course had been sent back into SLORC-controlled areas of Burma to train others in the theory and methods of political defiance. However, some of the most important students, those who were officials of various organizations, were still present in Mannerplaw. I was enormously impressed with the extent and depth of knowledge of nonviolent struggle that these prodemocracy leaders possessed.

The Burmese prodemocracy groups are unwilling as yet to throw away their military capacity, limited though it is. However, they are convinced in a hard-headed way that political defiance, when carefully planned, offers them the best option for the coming stage of their struggle. Even the officials and officers with decades of experience fighting the various military dictatorships in Rangoon by military means (some for over forty years) are convinced that major efforts now have to be put into political defiance.

In all my various travels, I have never encountered this combination of understanding about nonviolent struggle, realism, responsibility, recognition of the need for planning, and serious commitment.

It appears that despite the massacres of 1988, the prodemocracy people, even those who have been committed to violent means, are ready to try nonviolent struggle in refined and developed forms. If the first attempts at new applications of political defiance are even moderately effective, then the willingness to attempt new applications is likely to grow. If they fail, however, the consequences could be grave.

Clearly the educational work which has been done by Bob Helvey, the books in English which we have provided, and our assistance in translating into Burmese and publishing The Role of Power in Nonviolent Struggle (original edition in 1989), have been highly beneficial.

There are additional signs of hope. One of these is the shortwave broadcasts on Radio Norway in Burmese by opposition spokespersons. Reception is not perfect everywhere and it is necessary to pay the Norwegians for the radio time. However, it helps. Also, cassette of resistance news and messages are being taken or sent into various parts of Burma, and are being well received.

The people in Mannerplaw were most generous with their food and hospitality, and in their personal kindnesses. Their individual stories in the few cases in which I learned of them often included ghastly experiences, including imprisonment, solitary confinement, torture, dangers to family, and executions of relatives and friends (often in horrible ways). No one, however, seemed hardened and hateful. Rather, they seemed deter-
Exploring Nonviolent Struggle in Thailand and Burma
(Continued from p. 5)

mined to bring an end to this massive oppression and the accompanying economic suffering of their peoples, hopefully by political defiance rather than a continuation of the long war.

If the liberation of Burma can be achieved by nonviolent struggle, this will prevent a major international crisis in that part of the world, and also will provide another example of the potential of people power for liberation, an example which could have important consequences in China and elsewhere.

Bangkok, Thailand
Following my stay in Mannerplaw, I returned to Bangkok, where there is growing interest in civilian-based defense as a means of preventing military coups, of which Thailand has had a long history. Interest was heightened in May 1992 when predominantly nonviolent demonstrations against military control of the government led to the resignation of the unelected prime minister, General Suchinda Kraprayoon. The conflict also resulted in many casualties, and over two hundred persons are still missing.

In Bangkok, Professor Chaiwat Satha-Anand of Thammasat University arranged for me to speak to a variety of audiences about nonviolent struggle, civilian-based defense, and the problem of defending against coups d’etat.

I had the opportunity to address officers and faculty of the Command and General Staff College of the Royal Thai Army, faculty and students of the Faculty of Political Science of Thammasat University, and Buddhist monks at the Maha Chulalongkorn Buddhist University. I also met with members of the Local Development Institution, the United States Information Service, and the Asia Foundation, as well as with retired General Saiyud Kerdphol, formerly supreme commander-in-chief of the Thai military forces, and now vice president of the Poll Watch Committee that helps to ensure honest elections. In addition, I had several individual interviews with journalists and private meetings with Burmese students.

At Thammasat University, I attended a gathering of about fifty participants and leaders of the May 1992 uprising against the appointment of Suchinda as Prime Minister. I also attended a meeting of individuals from various nonviolent social change groups held at Ashram Wongsamit in Pathum Thani, north of Bangkok. In both meetings, I noted the apparent absence of either strategic planning or strategic analysis. Neither the May 1992 events nor the current activities of the social change groups seemed to have a grand plan or strategic conception underlying them. There was clearly a need to develop this skill.

Additionally, a luncheon was arranged with a sympathetic military officer who ably explained the self-image of the military officers and their responsibilities and duties. They see themselves as a special group with duties to support the revered monarchy and at times to save the nation from grave problems and from the perceived incompetence and corruption of the politicians. Hence, despite the desirability of greater democracy, there were said to be times when military officers had a duty to conduct a coup in order to put an end to harmful developments occurring because of the parliamentary system. The oath of office taken by military officers currently does not include a pledge to support the constitution, as it once did.

On November 4, I met at the Parliament building with Dr. Charoen Kanthawongs, chair of the Parliamentary Affairs Committee, to discuss anti-coup legislation. Professor Chaiwat Satha-Anand also participated in the discussions. Dr. Charoen expressed great interest in the proposals which I had prepared for legislation on preparations for defending constitutional government against attacks by coups d’état. After our meeting, Dr. Charoen repeated to the press what he had told us during the meeting: that he intended to appoint a sub-committee to examine the desirability of such legislation.

Since my return to the United States, reports from Bangkok indicate that newspaper articles on the anti-coup defense proposal continue to be published, and the Parliamentary Affairs Committee is proceeding with its consideration of the anti-coup defense proposal. A sub-committee is being formed that will include politicians, military officers, jurists, and members of the media. Dr. Charoen will chair the sub-committee and Professor Chaiwat Satha-Anand is being employed as staff person for the sub-committee. This is an extremely encouraging development.

A Dialogue with Arun Gandhi
(Continued from p. 3)

phy of nonviolence we make a mockery of it. The basis for a solution must always be bilateral agreement, never unilateral.

Yours sincerely,
Arun Gandhi, Director
M.K. Gandhi Institute
for the Study of Nonviolence,
Christian Brothers University,
Memphis, Tennessee

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Victory for GE Boycott
(Continued from p. 1)

weapons. It took a major grassroots effort
to force that power player out, and now
the nuclear weapons industry won’t wield
the kind of influence in Washington that it
has for the past fifty years.”

Through the GE Boycott, millions of
people mobilized to successfully challenge
the powerful weapons manufacturer.
Activists spent long hours collecting
boycott signatures, handing out informa-
tional leaflets, and setting up community
meetings. Over five hundred endorsing
organizations lent their support to the GE
Boycott and worked to activate their
supporters. Activists in the medical,
religious, and international communities
directly challenged GE’s top management.
Consumer boycotters actively sought out
alternative products, sending a clear
economic message to GE. Letter-writing
campaigns, phone blitzes, direct engage-
ment at GE shareholder meetings, and
protests at GE facilities were central parts
of the campaign.

Six and one half years of committed
work by thousands of activists around the
world culminated in 1992 with decisive
pressure on GE. In 1992, INFACT won an
Academy Award for its hard-hitting film
*Deadly Deception: General Electric,
Nuclear Weapons, and Our Environment.*
The campaign also secured the support of
the United Methodist Church, increased
financial losses to GE’s medical equip-
ment division to over $50 million, secured
public television and international
broadcasts of *Deadly Deception,* and
mobilized hundreds of students to chal-
genue GE recruiters on campuses across
North America.

“The success of this grassroots cam-
aign,” Lamy said, “shows that ordinary
people can move a transnational corpora-
tion and make a real difference.”