

BUILDING THE ALTERNATIVE SOCIETY

Nonviolent social change is not solely about removing structures that support oppression and violence. Alternative structures based on principles of justice, nonviolence and equality need to be introduced in their place. This *construction* project should run in tandem with the de-constructive, or *resistance* project.

History has taught us that revolutions which destroy the old order but do not have in place strong parallel institutions to fulfil the needs of a society, can quickly revert to old patterns of repression and hierarchy.

If sufficient effort is given to building the desired alternative society within the shell of the existing structure, the revolution has a greater chance of lasting success. In the face of the Spanish Civil War, for example, Catalonian people were able quickly to establish an efficient democracy operating on the principles of mutual aid and equality. This was because of a centuries-old culture of peasant co-operation and years of anarchist organisation in the towns. More recent examples have been the work of Solidarity in Poland and the African National Congress in South Africa.

How *resistance* and *construction* complement each other:

Features of desired society	Resistance	Construction
Sustainable, democratic transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> roads protests <i>Reclaim the Streets</i> cyclist and pedestrian action groups campaign against privatisation of public transport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> cycling walking car pooling hitch-hiking building local services support public transport <i>Safe Routes to School</i>
Economic equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> trade unionism solidarity movements campaign and action groups party political organisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> income pooling Fair Trade workers' co-ops LETS schemes Credit Unions simple living
Good quality housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> tenants' associations rent strikes homelessness campaigns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> housing co-ops self-build housing

Note that the boundary between construction and resistance is often fuzzy. For example, as a cyclist (construction) you might be involved in a cycling action group (resistance) which is involved in promoting the *Safe Routes to School* project (construction) as well as turning out on *Critical Mass* demonstrations (resistance). As

ever, the attempt to separate everything neatly into two camps is flawed: resistance and construction projects are interlinked and interdependent.

You might find it useful to use the above table with examples of your own. Apply it, say, to issues like food, peace and energy. In doing this, the interconnections between the construction and resistance approaches may become more apparent, and sometimes unexpected links can be found.

Mohandas Gandhi, whose life and work remains an important reference point in any examination of nonviolent revolution, did make analytical distinctions between resistance and construction activities during the Indian liberation struggle. The overarching concept was that of *satyagraha*, or Truth Force. This concept encouraged a unity between people concentrating on one of the two approaches to social change. It serves the same purpose today and also encourages an holistic approach within each individual working for social change.

TURNING THE TIDE, Friends House, Euston Road, London, NW1 2BJ, UK

Tel: +44 (0)207 663 1064/ 1061

Email: denised@quaker.org.uk or stevew@quaker.org.uk

Turning the Tide is a programme of Quaker Peace and Social Witness