

Without clearly thought out strategy, the task of abolishing war can seem overwhelming. Here *Joanne Sheehan* presents some ideas for those engaged in developing nonviolent campaigns.

Developing strategies for abolishing war

● Joanne Sheehan

It's overwhelming to think about what we need to do: abolish war. How can we do it? How can we not? Martin Luther King Jr cautioned that we are confronted with the choice of "nonviolence or nonexistence". Faced with these choices, we need to re-energise the process of exploring and experimenting with nonviolence.

The War Resisters' International Statement of Principles explains what nonviolence means to us:

The WRI embraces nonviolence. For some, nonviolence is a way of life. For all of us, it is a form of action that affirms life, speaks out against oppression, and acknowledges the value of each person.

Nonviolence can combine active resistance, including civil disobedience, with dialogue; it can combine non-cooperation — withdrawal of support from a system of oppression — with constructive work to build alternatives. As a way of engaging in conflict, sometimes nonviolence attempts to bring reconciliation with it: strengthening the social fabric, empowering those at the bottom of society, and including people from different sides in seeking a solution. Even when such aims cannot immediately be achieved, our nonviolence holds us firm to our determination not to destroy people.

Barbara Deming, feminist nonviolent activist and author, stated that "Nonviolence is an exploration, one that has just begun." To fully explore the potential for social transformation that nonviolence holds, we need to consider all the components of nonviolent campaigns, including civil disobedience.

The issue of breaking the law While many groups engage in a number of nonviolent strategies, civil disobedience (CD) is the most controversial. Working within the framework of the law or being willing to act outside the law (or in accordance with international law, but in violation of local law), is a far deeper decision than simply choosing a tactic. The law is considered "sacred", breaking the law a very serious act.

Staying within the legal system limits us. While it may give us access to the greater number of people who accept a legal approach, we cut ourselves off from

the full potential of the power of nonviolent action.

Working solely within the legal framework gives a lot of credence to a system that does not change easily.

Relying too much on civil disobedience as our source of power also limits us. Civil disobedience actions are often less accessible to a broad number of people. Doing CD can become a macho way of "proving yourself". High-risk actions can put the activists on a pedestal, those who do the most jail time are "the most committed", creating a hierarchy of actions and activists. Some nonviolence activists become "CD junkies", getting arrested often, believing that all other tactics are too conservative. During the Vietnam War, some proclaimed "You're not really working hard enough to oppose the war unless you're in jail, or on your way in or out."

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When we lean too much on one side or the other of the issue of breaking the law, we see and use only those tactics that support our particular viewpoint — we easily lose a balanced perspective.

"*Satyagraha* is not predominantly civil disobedience, but a quiet and irresistible pursuit of truth", said Gandhi. "On the rarest occasions it becomes civil disobedience. But conscious and willing obedience must... precede it."

The challenge

In her book *Conquest of Violence, The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict*, Joan Bondurant said: "Gandhi presented us with a remarkable set of experiments, pregnant with meaning for the future. But we cannot expect that Gandhi has given us all the answers. The challenge still remains... For large-scale conflict in the second half of the twentieth century takes on dimensions which threaten annihilation. The alterna-

tives for engaging in conflict constructively can surely be devised." The challenge still remains as we end this century.

Gandhi and King developed nonviolent campaigns to accomplish their goals. Creative campaigns hold the key to exploring the potential of nonviolence. A nonviolent campaign is a process through which the most number of people come together with a common vision, setting common goals, creative strategies and employing a diversity of tactics. A nonviolent campaign is not simply a matter of identifying a problem and using a tactic to address it — such as "a leafleting campaign" or a "campaign of civil disobedience". It's more than a group of projects strung together over a period of time (ie write a leaflet, organise an educational forum, then a series of demonstrations). The power of a nonviolent campaign comes in the creative combination of these components, the strategic thinking and commitment of the participants.

Components of a nonviolent campaign:

Common understanding

Is there a common understanding of the problem or situation that exists? Have we analysed why that reality exists? Does the analysis include the social, economic and political structures? Do we have a common understanding of what it means to have a nonviolent campaign? (This work needs to be done on an ongoing basis, not just when a campaign is being instigated. Who develops the analysis? Is it a participatory process or hierarchical?)

Discipline

What is our mutually agreed upon nonviolent discipline? Is it clearly stated? (In a nonviolent campaign, this might take the form of a list of nonviolence guidelines that people will abide by when working on all components of the campaign.)

Research

What do we know, what do we need to know? In accordance with nonviolent principles, are we searching for the truth, or just trying to "prove our side"?

Information

Have we used the research to better understand the context? Are our cam-



Dannenberg, Germany: taking a break on the anti-Castor protest. PHOTO MARCUS KOOPMAN

paign goals clear? Is the information understandable for the people we are trying to reach? (A role of nonviolent activists is to take the research and put it in a form that can be widely used in a campaign.)

Education

Have we developed good educational materials and processes? Have we considered the different audiences we want to reach? How are we using the media to raise awareness?

Training

Do we have the skills we need to organise? Do we have training in nonviolence and nonviolent action so we can better understand that option? Is the training available to everyone?

Allies

Who should we work in coalition with? Who are our allies, who are likely allies, who are potential allies or supporters if we communicate with them more?

Negotiation

Do we have clear goals that we can negotiate around? In developing our common understanding, are we clear about whom we are negotiating with? Have we communicated that to the appropriate parties? Have we worked to build mutual respect with those we are negotiating with? Do we also need to negotiate with potential allies? In his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail", Martin Luther King Jr writes,

You may well ask, "Why direct action? Why sit-ins, marches, etc? Isn't negotiation a better path?" You are exactly right in your call for negotiation. Indeed, this is the purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and establish such creative tension that a community that has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatise the issue that it can no longer be ignored.

Constructive Programme / Alternative Institutions

"Has the movement undertaken positive,

constructive steps with a view to providing services to its own members and to the public, and even in some cases to the opponent?" asked Joan Bondurant in *Conquest of Violence*. (Often missing in campaigns in the West, and emphasised in the East.)

Demonstrations

How can we best demonstrate our concerns? Have we considered the more than 250 methods of nonviolent action? Are we clear about the objectives of the demonstration with ourselves and others?

Civil Disobedience

Have we prepared for a nonviolent civil disobedience action? Have we done all we can to educate, build support, demonstrate our concerns, and prepare people for a civil disobedience action? How will it advance our cause? What are the objectives of the action? Are we creative about our civil disobedience? Will it put the kind of pressure on the adversary to move them?

Legislative and Electoral Action

Is legislative or electoral action an educational tactic or a goal of the campaign?

Reconciliation

How can we make peace with the opponents and resolve the injustice?

A campaign should take people through processes of empowerment. It should be personally empowering — people discovering and exercising their own power against oppression, exclusion, and violence, and for participation, peace and human rights. Groups working on a campaign develop a collective power, learning how to be organisers and become political strategists in the process. A progression of campaigns can move us towards social empowerment that leads to the social transformation we are working for.

Faced with the horrors of the world, it's easy to do the nonviolent equivalent of lashing out — jumping into action or activity without stepping back or looking ahead. Radicals need to not only get to the roots of a problem — we need to root ourselves and our own actions in something more comprehensive.

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