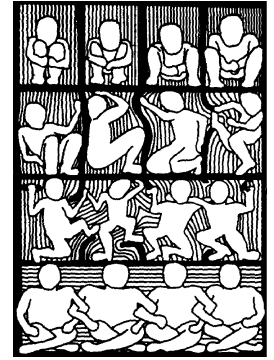


# Making Waves



The newsletter of the Quaker *Turning the Tide* Programme for the understanding of active nonviolence, and its use for positive social change

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Edited by Kiri Smith

## Post September 11 – where now for direct action?

Much of this issue of *Making Waves* was written before 11<sup>th</sup> September and the start of the 'war on terrorism'. The video *Turning The Tide* commissioned to promote debate about nonviolence amongst activists and Quakers, 'Nonviolence for a Change', was completed during the summer of this year. The work of *Turning The Tide* in exploring and providing training in active nonviolence continues as before, in the face of extreme violence and an atmosphere of pervasive fear.

So does our work, do our considerations and reflections on using active nonviolence to create a just, sustainable, peaceful world, lose their significance now? We don't necessarily have a ready answer when we're asked what we would do instead of bombing Afghanistan. We don't have a handy solution to international terrorism up our sleeves – this much we share with the US and UK governments. But when the bombing has stopped, the problems that many of our social change movements have been addressing will still exist and will quite possibly be magnified. There will still be a massive divide between rich and poor;

multinational companies will still be stripping the earth of its resources to feed the all-consuming demands of the west; many communities will still be struggling to have their voice heard, to participate in the running of their own affairs.

By studying, by practising, by developing the tools of active nonviolence we are extending the possibilities of peaceful change, we are slowly helping to create a climate where resort to bombing and hijacking planes is unacceptable.

Two main themes emerge from this issue of *Making Waves*: empowerment and the debate around the use of violent / nonviolent tactics to create change. Both these themes are timely post September 11<sup>th</sup>. Without the empowerment of people to participate in creating their own futures the conditions for the seeds of terrorism and war flourish. Without opening up for question the tactics we use, we risk stagnation and ineffectiveness in a world that is evidently desperate for change.

## After Genoa: asking the right questions

by Starhawk

Genoa was a watershed for the antiglobalisation movement. It's clear now that this is a life or death struggle in the first world as it has always been in the third world. How we respond will determine whether repression destroys us or strengthens us. To come back stronger, we have to understand what actually happened there.

The media are telling one story about Genoa: a small group of violent protestors (the Black Bloc) got out of hand and the police overreacted. I've heard variations on this from within the movement: the Black Bloc was allowed to get out of hand to justify police violence. But that's not what happened in Genoa, and framing the problem that way will keep us focused on the wrong questions. Let's be clear: In Genoa we encountered a

carefully orchestrated political campaign of state terrorism. The campaign included disinformation, the use of infiltrators and provocateurs, collusion with avowed Fascist groups (and I don't mean fascist in the loose way the left sometimes uses the term, I mean Fascist as in 'direct inheritors of the traditions of Mussolini and Hitler'), the deliberate targeting of nonviolent groups for tear gas and beating, endemic police brutality, the torture of prisoners, the political persecution of the organisers, and a terrorist night raid on sleeping people by special forces wearing 'Polizia' T-shirts under black sweatshirts, who broke bones, smashed teeth, and bashed in the skulls of nonresisting protestors.

They did all this openly, in a way that indicates they had

no fear of repercussions and expected political protection from the highest sources. That expectation implicates not only the proto-Fascist Berlusconi regime of Italy, but by association the rest of the G8, especially the U.S. since it now appears that L.A. County Sheriffs helped train the most brutal of the special forces. Italy has a history of the employment of such tactics, going back to the 'strategy of tension' used against the left in the 1970s (and even the 1920s and 1930s, when you hear prisoners describe being tortured in rooms with pictures of Mussolini on the walls). The same tactics have, of course, been used extensively by U.S. agencies and other countries. Italy also has a political culture of highly confrontational actions and streetfighting with the police, as well as strong pacifist groups and groups like the Tute Bianca who are exploring new political territory that goes beyond the traditional definitions of violence and nonviolence.

All of this set the stage upon which the events of the G8 protest were played. The police used the Black Bloc, or more accurately, the myth and image of the Black Bloc, very effectively in Genoa, for their ends, not ours. Some aspects of Black Bloc tactics made that easy: the anonymity, the masks and easily identifiable dress code, the willingness to engage in more confrontational tactics and in property damage, and perhaps most significant, the lack of connection with the rest of the action and the organisers. But the Black Bloc was not the source of the problem in Genoa.

The problem was state, police and Fascist violence. Acts were done in Genoa, attributed to protestors, that were irresponsible and wrong by anyone's standards – but it seems likely now that most of them were done by police. Or if not, police provocateurs were so endemic that it's impossible to tell what might have been done by people in our movement or to hold anyone accountable. So the issue Genoa presents us with is not 'How do we control the violent elements among us?' although that conceivably might be an issue someday. It's 'How do we forestall another campaign of lies, police-instigated violence, and retaliation?' There's no easy answer to that question. The simplest strategy would be to go back to a strict form of nonviolence, which many people are proposing. I don't know why I find myself in resistance to that answer. I'm a longtime advocate of nonviolence, I have no intention of ever throwing a brick through a window or lobbing a rock at a cop myself, and in general I think breaking windows and fighting cops in a mass action is counterproductive at best and suicidal at worst.

One reason might be that I can no longer use the same word to describe what I've seen even the most unruly elements of our movement do in actions and what the cops did in Genoa. If breaking windows and fighting back when the cops attack is 'violence', then give me a new word, a word a thousand times stronger, to use when the cops are beating nonresisting people into comas. Another might be just that I like the Black Bloc. I've been in many actions now where the Black Bloc

was a strong presence. In Seattle I was royally annoyed at them for what I saw as their unilateral decision to violate agreements everyone else accepted. But in Washington in 2000, I saw that they abided by guidelines they disagreed with and had no part in making, and I respected them for it. I've sat under the hooves of the police horses with some of them when we stopped a sweep of a crowded street using tactics Gandhi himself could not have criticised. I've choked with them in the tear gas in Quebec City and seen them refrain from property damage there when confronted by local people. I'm bonded. Yes, there have been times I've been furious with some of them, but they're my comrades and allies in this struggle and I don't want to see them excluded or demonised. We need them, or something like them. We need room in the movement for rage, for impatience, for militant fervour, for an attitude that says 'We are badass, kickass folks and we will tear this system down.' If we cut that off, we devitalise ourselves.



*Cartoon by Phil Somerville.*

We also need the Gandhian pacifists. We need room for compassion, for faith, for an attitude that says, 'My hands will do the works of mercy and not the works of war'. We need those who refuse to engage in violence because they do not want to live in a violent world. And we need space for those of us who are trying to explore forms of struggle that fall outside the categories. We need radical creativity, space to experiment, to carve out new territory, invent new tactics, make mistakes. There are campaigns being waged now that are defined as clearly and strictly nonviolent, where guidelines have been respected, and no black clad brick throwing figures have attempted to impose other tactics. But the actions directed against the big summits have drawn their strength from a much broader political spectrum, from unions and NGOs to anarchist revolutionaries. All

these groups feel a certain ownership of the issue and the fat, juicy targets that the summits represent.

How do we create a political space that can hold these contradictions, and still survive the intense repression directed against us? How do we go where no social movement has ever gone before? Maybe these are the questions we really need to ask. In a life or death situation, there's a great temptation to attempt to exert more control, to set rules, to police each other, to retreat to what seems like safe ground. But all my instincts tell me that going back to what seems safe and tried and true is a mistake. As an anarchist, I'm not interested in doing any kind of police work. I want to call each other to greater, not lesser freedom, knowing that also means greater responsibility and greater risk. Using provocateurs to instigate violence which can be blamed on dissenters and used to justify repression is a time tested, generally successful way of destroying radical movements. But it's a strategy that thrives on the familiar, the expected. Identifying provocateurs in the midst of an action is like trying to spray for a pest in the garden: the toxicity of the spray, of the suspicion, secrecy and lack of trust, may be as great as that of the pest. But plants can resist pests if they are grown in healthy soil. To forestall infiltration and provocateurs, we need to examine the soil of our movement.

I'd like to suggest three nutrients that can make us more pest resistant: communication, solidarity and creativity. We have to be in communication. We can no longer afford to wage parallel but disconnected struggles at the same demonstration. We need to clearly state our intentions and goals for each action, and ask others to support them. We may need to argue and struggle with each, to negotiate, to compromise. Articulating a clear set of agreements about tactics may at times be the best way to forestall provocateurs. But agreements are only agreements when everyone participates in making them. If one wing of the movement attempts to impose them, they are not agreements but decrees, and moreover, decrees that will not be respected and that we have no power to enforce. That communication involves risk on both sides, but those risks have to be taken, intelligently and thoughtfully, of course. We need to put a higher priority on our communication than on our standing with our funding sources or our security culture. If my tactic of choice makes it impossible for me to talk to you, I need to question whether it's an appropriate tactic for a mass action. In that dialogue, we actually have to struggle to respect each other. No one gets to claim the moral high ground. None of us get to exclusively set the agenda, determine the form of what we do or decree the politics. Those who advocate nonviolence, a chief tenet of which is to respect your opponent, need to practice it within the movement. You can't just dismiss the Black Bloc and other militant groups as 'negative rebels' or immature adolescents acting out. They have a political perspective that is serious, thoughtful, and deserves to be taken seriously.

But it also means that more militant groups need to stop

dismissing those who advocate nonviolence as middle-class, passive, and cowardly. The Black Bloc is widely respected for its courage, but it takes another kind of courage to sit down in front of the riot cops without sticks or rocks or Molotovs. It takes courage to have your identity known, to organise in your own city where you can't disappear but must stand and face the consequences. 'Nonviolent' does not equate with 'nonconfrontational', or with wanting to be safe on the sidelines. The essence of nonviolent political struggle is to create intense confrontations that highlight the violence in the system, and then to stand and openly take the consequences. In today's repressive climate, where 88 year old nuns are being given year long prison sentences for completely pacific actions, the risks of nonviolence may be much higher than the risks of anonymous street fighting. We need to communicate clearly with the larger community as well, proactively, not reactively. We have to let people know what our intentions are and what the parameters of the action might be. Imagine the Black Bloc putting out a Crimestopper Leaflet: 'If you see a group of masked figures looting small shops, burning private cars, and endangering your children, get their badge numbers! They are the Cops! Because we're the Black Bloc, and that's not what we do'. We need to talk to the not-already-converted, door to door, face to face, not to lecture them but to ask about their lives and the effects these issues have on them, and to ask them to show support for us.

We need to be in real solidarity with each other. Solidarity is not just about refraining from denouncing each other to the media, or holding vigils for those in jail. It means putting the good of the whole above our immediate individual desires or even safety. It means supporting each other's intentions and goals, even when we only partially agree with them. Not just by saying, 'you do your thing and I'll do mine,' but by actually taking responsibility for our actions and for the impact they have on others beyond ourselves or our immediate group. Greater freedom demands greater responsibility. In a mass action individual decisions have a collective impact. Some tactics are like the loud-voiced guy in the meeting: they take up all the available space and make it impossible for anyone else to be heard. Cops are not creatures of fine distinctions. If one group is throwing Molotov cocktails and smashing shop windows, it may well affect how the police react to the pacifist group a block over. The community, too, may miss the subtle difference between burning the neighbourhood bank and burning the neighbourhood store. So, just as the loud guy has to learn to step back occasionally and shut up to give others a chance to be heard, high confrontation tactics sometimes need to be restrained just to allow other possibilities to exist.

Solidarity is about what we do on the street. It means protecting each other as best we can, and certainly not deliberately endangering each other. Of course, one group's idea of protection may be another group's idea of endangerment. A barricade may seem protective, but if your strategy is to de-escalate tension, a barri-

cade may actually make your situation more dangerous. We need to respect each other's choices. Solidarity means that if I'm sitting down in front of a line of riot cops and you're behind me, I can trust that you're restraining the crowd behind from trampling me, not throwing a rock over my head. And that if you push through a line of cops and I'm behind you, I'm there to support you, not restrain you. We have a right to ask for solidarity from everyone who wants to be out on the street together. Solidarity is also about holding each other accountable, critiquing what we do together with the purpose of learning from our mistakes and becoming more effective. Critiquing is not attacking: a good critique is a mark of respect, it's saying, 'I know that you and I share a common interest in making this work better'.

Perhaps most of all, we need to be creative. Maybe, just to stimulate our thinking, we need to mount one action with one simple guideline: No tired, overused tactics allowed. No cross-the-line symbolic arrests, no bricks through the windows of Starbucks. And please, please, no boring chants that have been recycled since the Vietnam War, if not before. ('Hey hey, ho ho, King George the Third has got to go?') At least this would be a useful thought experiment. We need to think outside the fences and the boxes. We need to do the unexpected, change clothes, change tactics, be where they don't expect us to be, doing what they don't expect us to do. If they expect us to trash McDonalds, we're there disrupting its operations by giving out free food and asking the workers how globalisation affects them. If they expect militants to dress in black, then the militants go lavender and the pacifists stage a Funeral for Democracy, surrounding the White House dressed in black mourning and veils. If they expect us to walk up quietly in groups of five to get arrested, we disappear and reappear somewhere else entirely. If the hardcore streetfighters pull down a fence, the 88 year old nuns are the first through into the red zone. If they block off the meeting and concentrate their defences on a wall, we claim the rest of the city. If they hide the summits in inaccessible locations, we choose our own turf.

These are hard challenges, but these are hard times, too and they're not getting easier. I've already seen too many movements splinter and fail or grandstand themselves to death in ever more extreme and suicidal acts, or suffocate from self-righteous moralism. I want to win this revolution. I don't think we have the ecological and social leeway to mount another one if this fails. And the odds of winning are so slim that we can't afford to be anything but smart, strategic, and tight with one another. We need to stand shoulder to shoulder, even when we disagree. And if we can do that, if we can hold these differences within our movement, we'll have taken a step toward meeting the much greater challenges we'll face when we do win, and come to remake a deeply diverse world.

*Thanks to Lisa Fithian, Hilary McQuie and David Miller for discussions that contributed to this piece.*

## Why violence?

by Chris Gwyntopher

Being forced by a line of charging, masked riot police, batons raised, down a narrow street near Oxford Circus. Seeing and trying to remove the ammunition from a few protesters among the 50 odd near you who are throwing bits of wood, cans and bottles at the police. Such experience offers insight into the causes of violence. Food for thought for those of us involved in the movement against global capitalism.

I was a nonviolent participant observer in the events on May Day 2001 because I had been selling and giving away *Nonviolent Action*. I have a perspective, just as a journalist, a police witness or an academic sociologist would have. I was an interested party but I am also interested in the truth. Without truth we cannot learn how better to engage in action to achieve just social change in the future.

Why violence? Many commentators would say that violence does not need to be explained. There is an assumption in popular literary and scientific media that human beings are naturally violent and that violence is both normal and inevitable in a situation of conflict and threat. Violence is indeed widespread but most people most of the time do not experience immediate physical violence. Most people experience structural violence in the form of poverty or powerlessness, but not a direct threat of injury or death. There is growing evidence that early humans were not violent war making predators and there are still a few nonviolent societies like the Batek Negrito (*Engaging the Powers* by Walter Wink, pp 34 to 38). The assumption of original violence is, I suggest, a product both of the human tendency to project violent feelings they have onto others, and of the excitement that violence generates in both participant and observer. The absence of overt physical violence can be boring and therefore tends not to be focused upon by science, history, journalism or fiction.

Violence causes pain, injury or even death. It has a strong tendency to escalate – one act of violence being responded to by another more destructive form. The Israeli/Palestinian conflict is currently a clear illustration of the last tendency. Violence is irrational from the perspective of either the human race as a whole or the global ecosystem. It is immoral according to most of the world's great ethical teachings, which acknowledge the Golden Rule of doing to others what you would want them to do to you. Violence by police creates martyrs and is used to justify further escalation of violence by activists. Violence by participants in anti-capitalism protests in London is likely to play straight into the hands of the Murdoch press and other capitalist media. Their circulation will go up and they will be better able to distort or hide the messages of the protesters. Violence in any situation therefore needs explanation.

Starting with the psychological level of explanation. Hitting back is a response which can be partially explained in neurological and bio-chemical terms. Take a hypothetical adult male, Tim the protester. When a masked and armed policeman raises his baton above his head messages travel from the nerve endings at the back of Tim's eyes to his brain. The brain organises and interprets the messages. The brain in turn sends messages to Tim's stomach, blood stream and muscles preparing them for vigorous action. Adrenaline is released and his body is prepared for fight or flight or nonviolent action. The autonomic nervous system is set in an active state and inessential functions like digestion are closed down. Whether his response is to find something to hit the policeman with or to run away or to try to disarm the policeman by nonviolent means like talking to him or sitting down in the road depends on a range of influences. These include his past experience of similar events, genetic traits, the chemical state of his body, Tim's self-image, his openness to the inner light and how he integrates and interprets these various influences.



Cartoon by Phil Somerville.

Explanation at the cultural, emotional, intellectual and spiritual levels are necessary to understand what choice Tim makes or even if he makes a choice. If his past experience includes his father raising a stick above his head to beat him when he was a child and the resulting pain, fear and anger have never been released or resolved, then his response is likely to be either anger expressed as an attempt to hit back, or running away in panic. The immediate choice between those options is likely to be determined by the number of people around him on what he perceives as his side and what they do. If they try to fight, he will fight. If they start to run, so will he. If, however, there is someone close by he knows and trusts who sits down facing the line of police he may do so too. He may need hugging or listening too as he tries to cope with the powerful feelings the threat produces in him.

If Tim has been confined in the cold and wet without access to food or a toilet for over six hours, as about 6000 demonstrators had been on May Day 2001, then

his response is more likely to be either to fight or to run away. Physical exhaustion will favour the latter but a high level of testosterone and a self-image as a tough man will favour the former.

The probability of Tim fighting back, perhaps with wood or fencing taken from a nearby building site, will be increased if there is no escape. Police tactics on May Day included boxing in protesters with lines of riot police backed by mounted police blocking both exits from a street. If there are no bottles or bits of wood around to use as weapons it is less likely Tim will be able to respond with violence. A few of us attempted to remove such weapons at least before a series of police charges down the side streets between Oxford Street and Tottenham Court Road made this impossible. Tim's reaction is also more likely to be violent if he has already been hit over the head with a police baton. One young man I saw on May Day said he was throwing stones at a shop window because he was angry at being hit over the head. An explanation is not a justification, but is often used as such.

If Tim comes from a cultural milieu in which seeking violent retribution is not only permitted, but approved of, it is more likely that he will choose the violent option. In so far as television, film, computer games and the mass circulation papers are transmitters of cultural values, the English cultural milieu is a violent one.

Ideology may also predispose Tim to act violently. He may believe, for instance, that the police are agents of a repressive capitalist state, and that by provoking them to further violence he is revealing the true nature of that system. He may have dreams, however unrealistic, of the industrial working class, globalised to include the exploited workers of the 2/3rd world, taking up arms and overthrowing the capitalist system.

Returning to May Day, my observation was that most violence was committed by the police in imprisoning people in Oxford Circus for six hours, much of it in the cold and rain, and without access to food or toilets; in smaller street imprisonments in the evening; and in baton charges. Those amongst the anti-globalisation activists who were ready to use violence or became violent as they felt threatened or trapped were in a minority despite some of the 'fluffies' staying away. Those I saw did not have weapons with them. They picked up what they could from building sites or pubs close to the police lines. Their violence consisted of throwing such missiles, in two instances trying to light fires and breaking shop windows. Some of us reduced the availability of missiles and prevented at least one fire. Had there been more of us and had we planned and trained we would have been more effective. Elsewhere, ARROW (Active Resistance to the Roots of War) activists prevented police being trampled on.

The above analysis is intended to provoke constructive response, debate and research. Do we need to get together to explore the idea of a nonviolent leaven in the ferment of big demonstrations?

# Community empowerment in South East Asia

by Jane Rasbash and Pracha Hutunuwatr

In South East Asia, development promotion over the past 50 years has over-emphasised economic growth without adequate consideration for environmental sustainability, social justice and cultural integrity. The result of this approach has been the degradation of the forests, indigenous forest communities and rural communities. Many of these communities have become direct victims of development projects such as big dams, expanded road construction and promotion of cash crops. The consequences of this structural violence include endless indebtedness of the farmers to government banks and private loansharks, and the decline of local culture.

There is much discussion about the importance of 'sustainable development' and 'income distribution' for present needs as well as the needs of future generations. Yet during the last few decades various governments and their technocrats, educated in the western paradigm of thinking, have made very few policy changes towards sustainability and social justice, for fear of jeopardizing economic growth.

For 30 years the NGO movement in most of SE Asia has been promoting nonviolent, bottom-up sustainable community development and has had some success at micro level. Even in the difficult conditions of Indo-China and Burma, some community-based organisations have emerged in the last ten years. In this part of the world there are a large number of traditional rural and forest communities still functioning well enough to give material and moral support for their members to live with some dignity. However these communities are in danger of disintegration in the context of modernisation and globalisation.

Since 1996, Spirit in Education Movement (SEM) has run regular 12-week Grassroots Leadership Training (GLT) courses for indigenous forest communities and the rural poor in the region. The aim of the courses is to empower communities to be self-reliant in terms of basic needs; maintain their cultural integrity; and sustain a healthy environment. A nonviolent and participatory approach is advocated in all activities. Thus, the SEM programmes aim to reduce poverty through environmental protection and ecological recovery, and through encouraging sustainable income-generating activities.

SEM is now embarking on a more ambitious project – an ongoing Regional Centre for Sustainable Communities. The basis will be a two-year GLT curriculum and supporting educational materials for both participants and their communities. The course will be offered to community leaders, to enhance their confidence,

their environmental and social perspectives, and develop their skills. Part of the training will support participants in developing participatory local projects that help to alleviate poverty, sustain forest ecosystems and preserve indigenous cultures. It is expected that a code of best practice for grassroots community development will emerge and this will be replicated in other villages and shared with a wider audience for public education and policy impact.

SEM works with hill-tribe groups where the indigenous knowledge of living in harmony with the forest is alive. This way of living, coupled with appropriate and cautious modernisation, can become a model of good forest practice. SEM has been involved with training the leaders of the Assembly of the Poor, who are direct victims of inappropriate development policy in Thailand. Both these groups have been involved with direct action including large-scale nonviolent protest for land-rights and self-determination, although the present focus is on rebuilding their communities in a sustainable way. A further interesting group is 'Engaged Spiritual Leaders' who have cultural influence at village level. In our experience, those with social concerns can use their strength very effectively to mobilise villagers. Changes are coming quickly to isolated communities all over SE Asia. It is planned to expand activities to prepare grassroots leaders to cope with changes so that they can become more pro-active, rather than victims of modernisation.

In SE Asia higher education is not usually an option for marginalised community leaders. The SEM programmes offer appropriate in-depth education, with substantial follow-up and community support. This enables community leaders to understand what is going on in the present political-economic system, including how the decisions that directly and indirectly influence their communities are made. Global and local interaction needs to be deeply understood so these communities will not fall victim to the negative aspects of globalisation and will be prepared to cope with rapid change. They need appropriate modern skills to organise and manage their communities as well as confidence in their own cultural and spiritual roots to give a solid base to their transformational activities. If they are well prepared and empowered, they will be able to preserve indigenous knowledge and skills as well as to adopt and skillfully adapt appropriate new tools from outside. These communities may not want or be able to live a consumer lifestyle on the scale of the modern sector. However, they can have a culturally rich and dignified community life, with security in the provision of basic needs and a harmonious relationship with a healthy natural environment.

In the broader spectrum of approaches to social change, SEM draws strongly on Ghandi's ideas of reconstruction programmes, and the Buddha's ways of organising the early sanghas. This means not relying on the state mechanism alone to bring about desirable social change. The socialist approach of capturing state power through revolutions and reforms in Eastern Europe, China and Indochina, has shown the limits of government

mechanisms. SEM aspires towards a strong and self-reliant community based movement, largely autonomous from the state. This is to ensure that the state role is supportive rather than dominant, and that local communities have the power to direct state policy. Most modern nation-states are getting weaker and weaker in relation to multi-national corporations. When there is a conflict between multi-nationals and local communities, most governments side with the multi-national corporations. The Western European model of social democracy – that has contributed a great deal towards social justice in Europe – has also encouraged the environmental degradation and exploitation of the third world, and the disintegration of communities and alienation of people in Western society. By contrast, the community-empowerment approach aims to move towards social justice and sustainable development, as well as maintain the community life without which human existence has little meaning.

## Community empowerment in Manchester

by Ruth Tod

We know what we are *against*, but what are we *for*? After Genoa, this question is being asked with increasing urgency. No more arms trade, no more nuclear weapons – yes, and what else? The anti-globalisation lobby covers a wide range of views, many of which fail to be specific. Some favour regional trading areas, others talk about the local economy, many have no answers. There is more clarity in the peace lobby: stop the Arms Race, ban nuclear weapons or ban all weapons. So how important is it to have clarity and positive visions? What can we agree on? And how important is it to balance opposition with work for something positive?

Recently I went to meet Helen Woodcock, an activist now working in the community at the Manchester Environmental Resource Centre initiative (MERCi) to see how and why her thinking had developed.

If you are familiar with Northern Inner City landscapes, you'll know something about the challenge of rescuing and refurbishing old canals, mills and terrace houses. Go to central Leeds or Birmingham and you'll see smart converted waterside offices and restaurants but further out you may still see the forlorn scene of neglect. Not so at Bridge-5 Mill in Ancoats, Manchester, opened in April this year. This great, exciting place has been transformed by local people into a community environment centre, thanks to a small team of energetic and determined activists, including Helen.

Opposition, she explained, was all very well up to a point but gradually they had got bored with always saying No! Sitting together in Amsterdam they had started to dream

of saying Yes! Most of all they wanted a place that was theirs, their own power base, where they could create their own vision, open the doors to more people, offer and demonstrate positive alternatives. So about 5 years ago, they started to fund raise. For £90,000 they bought Bridge-5 Mill, used only for storage since the 60s, overlooking the canal and not so far from the up and coming city developments. That is where their positive direct action began; the rebuilding of the Mill demonstrates it all. The renovation was carried out by local New Deal trainees, all of whom were interested in learning the necessary skills. Thanks to a specialist architect, 80% of the existing materials were reclaimed – wooden doors repaired and re-hung, the old snooker table brought into the kitchen as a shelf, grubby stone stairs cleaned and polished up to reveal signs of marble. Solar panels were installed in the roof and the waste land at the front was turned into a garden. Children designed the window bars and older people learnt to make them with training from a team of welders.

To do all this did they have to compromise their radical ideals? Possibly some would think that working with New Deal was in itself a compromise, but they had made the best of the system by insisting on taking on local people and interviewing them to find those that really wanted to get involved. As a result the men now have the skills to improve their homes and get jobs in socially and environmentally appropriate ways. What is happening in the Mill is radical because it is working from the bottom up, on the assumption that people know what they want and simply need the support to do it.

Even before the centre was open, Helen and the others went around to talk to people and invite them in to share ideas and make plans. One of their first projects arose from a neighbourhood meeting when they all decided to enter the area for the Britain in Bloom competition. With Council money, they worked on community gardens, bringing in gardeners to run training sessions. Young people made benches and sculptures from waste material, strawberries and cream were served to the judges on their tour, people took pleasure in working together to improve their own space. A joint constructive project based on local ideas, training and some outside funding works every time! It's radical because it empowering people to meet their own needs with appropriate environmentally friendly resources.

MERCi continues to develop along these lines. Local voluntary groups rent office space. Children and young people come to visit the exhibitions and the resource centre. A café will soon open on the ground floor. The programme for MERCi is set to develop along 4 streams: education, community involvement, the building and local enterprise. Plans in the pipeline include a food co-op selling relatively local produce and an eco-diesel business selling fat-based diesel substitute fuel. Both these initiatives provide an alternative to the global economy because they are about developing a local economy that works for the community and their environment. The ideas roll on and Bridge-5 Mill could be filled 5 times over. Perhaps they will spill out into the country, down

the canal or acquire another Mill for local enterprises.

Personally I think building a local, sustainable, community-based economy is one of the most radical, positive forms of direct action there are. And the energy from being positive in this kind of action is enormous because you are contributing to real results. Protest is essential too, of course. To be effective in the long term I think that it needs to be supported by positive actions and positive visions. Protest itself needs to have a positive message and a positive objective. It is not an end in itself, but a tool.

Have they used their direct action protest skills at MERCi, I wondered. Helen told me about the action to reclaim a playground that had been closed. Not wishing to expose their skills, she and others made a hole in the fence on the previous night. Morning came and they could not find the hole. Don't worry, I'll get our cutters, someone explained - we often creep in to play!

If direct action is motivated by a radical vision of community empowerment connected to the things that matter most, MERCi is definitely it. The energy and enthusiasm there is totally inspiring. Yes, Helen hid her dreadlocks and put on smart clothes to visit potential funders. But it was worth it; after all you do have to start where people are, who ever they are. As Helen says, there are lots of ways to achieve a radical vision. The important thing is to keep it radical, to keep respecting people (if not all their actions) and to keep learning and questioning.

## Anarchism - its time has come again

by Rick Salutin

This column has no, as they say, hook, other than a fear the news media will begin to discuss anarchism rather than just referencing it. So far, they've been content to simply substitute the term for communism, terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism and similar frights: 'Anarchy reigns in Genoa "war zone"'; 'Men in black behind chaos; anarchists, hardliners plan "actions"'; 'Chretien: Canada will punish anarchists at next G8 summit'. Its meaning is more or less assumed. Anarchists are violent; they believe in chaos. There are wry asides on how contradictory it is to belong to an anarchist group or go to an anarchist convention ('anarchists by definition are not supposed to be organised')!

There hasn't been much by way of 'analysis'; or 'in depth'; with sidebars and headshots of Bakunin, Kropotkin and Emma Goldman. That's the vacuum I'm rushing to fill.

What about all that chaos and anarchy? It sounds like a big pillow fight. How can they oppose organisation and order? Actually, anarchists don't. They oppose order

imposed from above; in other words, they oppose authority and power. Anarchism isn't about disorder but about the absence of authority. You could say it's taking the notion that power corrupts, really seriously. It assumes people are naturally social and don't require laws to force them to get along; in fact, the natural human state is anarchy, which comprises the only true order. The coercive order of governments and laws distorts this state. 'If there is a devil in human history,' said one anarchist, 'it is the principle of command'. You can disagree with this, but it's arguable and interesting.



The anarchist rejection of governments is based on this faith in the human impulse to self-regulate; every government by its nature imposes an order on society. But the principle of anarchism is not primarily anti-government - it's anti-hierarchy. In our time,

many people on both the left and right think the power of government has declined, while that of the private sector has grown. But the fight of anarchists has always been against all forms of domination, so you can see why they take a big role in protests against both corporate and state power.

Yeah, but what about the bomb-throwing and guys in black smashing up cars? Isn't that what they mean by direct action? Well, what's the alternative to direct action? It's indirect action, which is exactly the electoral systems we have. By voting, you transfer your power to act to representatives who, inevitably it seems, end up lording it over you. Direct action is the general term for people exercising political power themselves. That might mean the American Revolution, going on strike, creating co-ops or refusing to fight a war. The violent impulse is one strand of direct action, but so is the nonviolence of Gandhi or Leo Tolstoy. Both figure in the anarchist tradition. It was an anarchist who said, 'It is impossible to seize power in order to abolish it.'

Do I hear you say: 'It couldn't possibly work, it's never even been tried'? Well, actually, it has, for brief periods. During the English Revolution of the 17th century, the 'masterless men' in groups such as the Diggers and Ranters applied anarchist principles. The Paris Commune of 1870 ran the same way. The most extensive experiments came in the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s, when whole cities operated, successfully it seems, on anarchist models. All these were brought to an end by the armed forces of wealth and power, not by internal failure. The jury is still out. You could say the same of democracy or Christianity.

Let me finish by saying something personal about the new appeal of anarchism. For me, that appeal lies in an ability to reconcile individualism with a commitment to

society. I detest being forced into the anti-individual position. Voices on the right tend to claim individualism as theirs – even if most of them are locked happily inside big institutions such as the Fraser Institute, the National Post or the Departments of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. Those of us who incline, even if grumpily, to the left are expected to defend the collective against the individual.

Yet think about it. Which individuals flourish under the dominant economic and political culture of today? Mainly the rich. Only they can afford the best health care, education, leisure, culture, plus music lessons and theatre trips for their kids. And even for them, there's a strong downside, especially if they have a social conscience. This system preaches individualism but actually grinds most individuals into poverty or pre-occupation with survival, destroying the chance for their individuality to thrive. Anarchism declines the choice. It teaches, in Emma Goldman's words, 'how to be one's self and yet in oneness with others'; or, in Mikhail Bakunin's: 'Man is not only the most individual being on earth, he is also the most social'. That is, you can only truly be individual(ist) by being truly social(ist). I love wiggling out of those dichotomies.

If you would like to read more about Anarchism, Rick recommends 'Demanding the Impossible: a history of anarchism' by Peter Marshall. Available from the Quaker Bookshop – 020 7663 1030; [bookshop@quaker.org.uk](mailto:bookshop@quaker.org.uk)

## Book reviews

### Empowering the Earth: Strategies for Social Change

by Alex Begg  
Green Books, 2000. ISBN 1-870098-92-7 (paperback).  
£10.95 (plus p+p) from the Quaker Bookshop – 020 7663 1030; [bookshop@quaker.org.uk](mailto:bookshop@quaker.org.uk)

*Reviewed by Alan Paxton*

'It was so empowering', said a friend to me recently about a Critical Mass cycle ride. More and more activists seem to be empowering themselves, and speaking the language of empowerment. Is this necessarily a good thing? They include motorists and road hauliers demanding lower fuel prices, anarchists rioting in business districts, and the naked protester imprisoned for several months in his struggle for 'the right to be human'.

Alex Begg offers an analysis of power which promises to clarify these issues. He addresses the Green movement, but his book will be of interest to all activists working for radical social change. Power is inescapable, he argues, drawing on the work of Michel Foucault, who saw power as a network permeating society. Begg identifies hierarchical forms such as the 'power-from' of

monarchies claiming divine right, and the 'power-over' of modern capitalism, and contrasts these with the non-hierarchical 'power-within' of individual empowerment and 'power-to' of collective, co-operative action. Following anarchists such as Kropotkin and Bookchin he seeks to ground ethics in natural processes, arguing that they are self-regulating and non-hierarchical, and that we should follow this 'natural way'.

He is at his most convincing in his analysis of political and economic systems, which he illustrates with examples drawn from his work in the Green Party, in nonviolent direct action campaigns, and the co-operative movement. He suggests practical ways in which we can begin to build a new society within the shell of the old, without underestimating the resilience of the 'powers that be' and their ability to co-opt would-be subversives. He rightly stresses the inseparability of means and ends and the importance of nonviolence in preventing direct action from degenerating into eco-fascist nihilism and sectarian irrelevance.

His treatment of spiritual power is much more problematic. Like many Greens he regards religion as irredeemably patriarchal, hierarchical and oppressive, and he gives little more than passing mention to Gandhian, Buddhist and Christian approaches to nonviolent action. Yet empowerment through spirituality is central to his argument. What spiritual resources are left for him to draw on?

Into the intellectual void pours a tide bearing the devotional bric-a-brac of the alternative culture. Situationist hedonism and frivolity (the 'Association of Autonomous Astronauts' etc.) bob alongside chunks of New Age management-speak ('The person who completes a circuit unlocks the potential of the nascent system, and can see exponential growth as that potential *is* realized'). Even more prominent is an allegedly pagan personal growth ethic which derives less from ancient wisdom (which is 'at odds with our lifestyle and environment') than from the extreme individualism of the alternative therapy scene. It is emotive, seeing values as a matter of personal preference. 'No one can tell anyone else what is authentic for them', Begg declares. We must not listen to 'the policeman in our heads', but must cultivate our 'inner sense of direction' in order to be 'true to ourselves'. 'Resistance is therapy', he assures us.

He does not seem to realise that this pitches us into the hell of competing, manipulating egos which have no shared ground, not even 'nature', for their values. Activists can consume even more fossil fuel, throw half-bricks at the police, or stroll naked through the housing co-op (and these are not hypothetical examples), for what 'right' have the rest of us to be 'judgmental'?

How can we extract ourselves from this mess? At times Begg seems to be groping towards an Aristotelian conception of ethics and power as inseparable from our *telos* or intrinsic goal as human beings, as when he commends the 'animist physics' of the Middle Ages.

This could well prove to be a more fruitful branch of enquiry, as the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, Stanley Hauerwas and others suggest. For Christians, the powers stand under the judgment of God; the rights and wrongs of power are defined in terms of the Christian goal of the Kingdom (or Reign) of God. For Gandhi, the exercise of power through *satyagraha* was inseparable from the goal of Truth. Among Greens, E F Schumacher exemplifies this approach (see the chapter on education in 'Small is Beautiful'). It does not necessarily rule out 'power-from' and 'power-over' – there may be situations when it is right to exercise power in this hierarchical way, and wrong to refuse to do so. The authority of a parent over a child is an obvious example. Such authority can of course be abused, but few would argue that because some parents abuse their children, therefore parenthood itself should be rejected

This is a wide-ranging and thought-provoking book, but one which raises far more problems than it can resolve within its limited worldview. Further contributions to the empowerment debate are urgently needed.

## Peace is the way: writings on nonviolence from the Fellowship of Reconciliation

Edited by Walter Wink, Maryknoll, N. Y. Orbis Books, 2000; £14.99 (plus p+p £1.80) from Quaker Bookshop 020 7663 1030; [bookshop@quaker.org.uk](mailto:bookshop@quaker.org.uk)

*Reviewed by Stephanie Ramamurthy*

Right from its inception in 1914 the Fellowship of Reconciliation has stood against violence, unflinchingly supported peaceful resistance and given voice to reconcilers worldwide. These articles, taken from FOR's journal, *Fellowship*, and its predecessor, *The World Tomorrow*, are truly inspirational.

Time and again these articles show that nonviolence is not an easy option. It doesn't mean doing nothing; it means action and often involves a willingness to suffer for one's beliefs and yet still not hate the perpetrator of suffering. Indeed, many activists realise that the oppressor is himself a victim. Implicit in nonviolent action is a readiness to follow up peaceful methods of resistance with efforts at reconciliation. Then again, the remarkable power of nonviolence to turn enemies, if not into friends, at least to people we can sit down and talk with, comes over strongly. Throughout the book we are given many examples of its practical effect. We all know that such great souls as M.K. Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., both of whom are represented here, recognised these ideals. This book is full of demonstrations of the power of nonviolence.

The first section of the book, *The Visions of Peace*, is theoretical and includes such topics as the impossibility of pacifism, the pacifist way of life, and how

nonviolence works. It is well worth studying, but those interested in more personal accounts will find later sections more immediately appealing.

FOR's journal, being an American publication, includes many articles on the struggles of Black Americans for justice. Of these, perhaps the most powerful is Martin Luther King Junior's account of his 'pilgrimage to non-violence'. Early in life King became concerned about economic inequality and the injustices suffered by his own community. He studied Marxism but his religious faith led him to reject it. For a time he was influenced by Niebuhr but ultimately rejected his view of pacifism as 'passive non-resistance to evil expressing naive trust in the power of love' for Gandhi's understanding of pacifism as 'nonviolent resistance to evil'. He realised that Gandhi's concept of *satyagraha* – truth force, or love force – showed that love and nonviolence could be potent and practical instruments for transforming society. His academic training drew him to an intellectual belief in nonviolence but after his involvement in practical protest in Montgomery, Alabama, he realised the power of nonviolence as a way of life. King's influence over others is exemplified in Charles Alphin's article, *Growing up Black*.

Some compelling stories come from those I had not heard of before. Amongst them is Brian Willson, who lost his legs and suffered a head injury when he was run over by a train carrying weapons to a naval weapons station at the time of US intervention in Nicaragua. In 1990, three years after these appalling injuries, he said he appreciated having survived and being able to continue to work for justice. The train crew responsible for deliberately running over him as he lay on the tracks weren't doing 'what they really wanted to do... I saw them as victims, as well as participants in the crime of the US government.' Such an attitude is the result of a deep spiritual commitment and a clear understanding of what one is doing and why. Most activists are inspired by their faith, whatever it is. They may be Catholics, Protestants, Quakers, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus or simply inspired by a sense of the sacredness and interconnectedness of all life.

The articles are wide-ranging. You will find, for instance, Daniel Berrigan, Hildegard Goss-Mayr, Cesar Chavez, Danilo Dolci, Martin Niemoller and Thich Nhat Hanh. Somewhat to my surprise (or am I too smug?) I did not notice many Quaker or close-to-Quaker names, although Elise Boulding and Peace Pilgrim are included. Some notable British names – Adam Curle, Helen Steven, the women of Greenham Common, for example, are missing – but I suppose this is because of FOR's American roots. It is not surprising that Walter Wink found that selecting 54 articles from a periodical that has been published for about 80 years was a daunting task. Certainly the book makes an inspiring and informative read. It has the additional advantage of being equally good to read straight through or dip into here and there until all the articles are read.

# Nonviolence for a Change

A video from JustUs Productions, Friends Meeting House, St Giles, Oxford, OX1 3LW; justus@gn.apc.org. Available from them or from the Quaker Bookshop for £5 (plus £1 p+p) – 020 7663 1030; [bookshop@quaker.org.uk](mailto:bookshop@quaker.org.uk)

*Reviewed by George Monbiot*

Just after the attack on the World Trade Centre, I sat down with the philosopher Paula Casal to examine the circumstances under which violence – whether practised by states, dissident groups or individuals – might be morally acceptable. The violence/nonviolence debate had been the defining dispute of the anti-globalisation movement. Now, we figured, it was about to become the defining dispute of the early 21st Century, and we wanted the means of navigating the moral minefields opening up around us.

We came up with five broad criteria, all of which have to be met before any kind of violence towards people becomes acceptable. The violence contemplated must be a response to a life and death situation: in which death or grievous bodily harm is threatened by a failure to act. All other means of achieving your objectives must have been exhausted. The violence used must be the minimum necessary to achieve your ends. It must have a high likelihood of success. It must reduce, rather than increase, the sum total of violent conflict. It's clear that if these criteria are applied, then both the terrorist attack on New York and the American attack on Afghanistan fail the test. Fighting Hitler more or less passed, though it failed at all times to meet the 'minimum necessary' test (witness the bombing of Dresden). There is a moral argument for violent insurrection in West Papua (where the grip of government is loose), but perhaps rather less so in Tibet, where the chances of success are very low.

To me the criteria suggest that violence during protests in the nominal democracies of the First World is always unacceptable, failing on at least three counts. But this is not to say that violence is never permissible in societies where political closure (ie the termination of all other options) has not been achieved. Take, for example, the case of an asylum seeker, who is just about to be deported to a country in which she is almost certain to be killed. A handful of you are protesting, and you can see that if you were to shove the two immigration officers out of the way and bundle her into a taxi, you could save her life. All five criteria are met: by shoving the officers aside, perhaps even with a fair degree of force, you are reducing the sum total of foreseeable violence. As the possibilities of violence increase in the world, we need to be sure that we know when its use is and isn't acceptable. Just as importantly, we need to explore all

the means by which it can be avoided, to expand, in other words, the range of options whose elimination is required by criterion two. No better tool has been provided than the moving and remarkable video '*Nonviolence for a Change*'.

It is a common misconception that nonviolence or pacifism implies passivity. Violent activists have often characterised pacifists as cannon fodder, easily crushed by the unanswerable force of arms. This video shows how unjust that characterisation is. The people whose lives it follows have developed brave and delightfully creative strategies of subversion.

Ellen Moxley, a tiny, jolly, white-haired Trident Ploughshares campaigner, is shown climbing into Trident's floating research laboratory on Loch Goil and tipping its entire contents (minus the first aid kit) into the sea. It was doubtless partly because of their good humour and gentleness – the nonviolence which emanates from every pore – that she and the other avengers were acquitted, despite causing £80,000 worth of damage. A rally organised by opponents of the Ilisu dam the Turkish government is hoping to build with British help, drowning the cultural heartlands of the Kurds, brings Kurdish campaigners together with the villagers who were flooded out of their homes by a similar concrete apocalypse in north Wales. The historical grievance of the Welsh villagers is transformed into a burning and effective passion to prevent the same injustice being visited upon their new friends. Nonviolence for a Change shows how heat is turned into light: how protest can explain itself, becoming a demonstration in both senses of the word; how fury on both sides can be deflected and slowly turned into mutual respect and even resolution; how training and forethought can incapacitate and shame otherwise violent police, soldiers and security guards. The world will never be the same again, and we must re-examine our means of mapping and negotiating it. This video is the best compass you can buy.

Editors' note: *Captive State: the corporate takeover of Britain* is now out in paperback. Around 400 of George Monbiot's essays and articles are now online at <http://www.monbiot.com>

## Next issue of *Making Waves*

We welcome contributions, reviews and letters. Deadline for contributions: 30 March 2002

Editor: Kiri Smith

Design: Mary Hogan

Views expressed in this newsletter and in any leaflets enclosed are not necessarily endorsed by *Turning The Tide* or Britain Yearly Meeting.

# Nonviolence for a Change

- What is nonviolence?
- How do we measure effectiveness?
- What about democracy?
- Is property damage violent?
- Should all direct action be nonviolent?

All these questions and more addressed in a 25 minute video, accompanied by a discussion pack.



'This is beautifully made and inspiring video, which everyone involved in campaigning should see'  
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Available from: Quaker Bookshop for £5 (+ £1 postage & packing): 020 7663 1030 or [bookshop@quaker.org.uk](mailto:bookshop@quaker.org.uk).

## Could you be a Turning The Tide Resource Person?

Much of Turning The Tide's work is done by volunteer Resource People. They plan and lead workshops, write articles, work with campaigning groups developing strategy and tactics, and generally help to develop thinking about active nonviolence as a tool for bringing about change.

Turning The Tide tries to provide a supportive environment and personal development for Resource People and is currently developing an 'active non-violence curriculum' to support the learning of Resource People.

If you're interested, call Kiri on 020 7663 1064 or email [kiris@quaker.org.uk](mailto:kiris@quaker.org.uk).

# About Turning The Tide

Turning The Tide aims to advance the understanding of active nonviolence and its use for positive social change, using the experience of previous nonviolence movements.

We have a team of experienced trainers who work with campaigning groups on issues such as:

- Developing clear visions and shared values
- Developing campaign strategies and goals based on careful analysis of obstacles to change and power relationships.
- Developing creative methods for fulfilling the strategies
- Developing good group processes, valuing the contributions of all
- Individual skills for responding non-violently in situations of stress and violence

We work on the principle that the way we behave now shapes the world we will get when change happens.

For more information contact Kiri Smith or Steve Whiting

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