

The Folklore of War and Peace

Marty Branagan

ABSTRACT: The wholesale adoption of nonviolent methods is impeded both by a poor understanding of them, and by a number of widely-held misconceptions and furbies—such as that nonviolence only succeeds against civilised opponents. Even revolutions thought to have succeeded through violence can be seen to have had a large component of nonviolence, but this has gone unrecognised because of the more subtle approach of nonviolence.

In Australian and many other societies, there is a tendency for folklore to reinforce the paradigm that militarism is a necessary evil. A series of widely-held beliefs continues to prop up militarism and prevent the adoption of nonviolence as the society's preferred method of conflict resolution and social change. These beliefs include that humans are inherently violent, that the world is becoming a more violent place and that terrorists cannot be negotiated with. They include a belief that nonviolence is a middle-class and weak option that only works against civilised opponents and would never succeed against ruthless regimes such as the Nazis. Such beliefs are generally unfounded and are impeding progress towards a more peaceful and sustainable future.

Australia spends between 26 and 32 billion dollars a year on 'defence', which in relative terms is higher than most Western developed countries. Despite public opposition, this is increasing by about 5% pa and guaranteed until 2030: 'No other type of Australian public expenditure has ever been promised such largess for such a long period' (Langmore et al. 2010: online). The *increase* alone in Australian military spending in 2010–11 is 50 per cent greater than the *total* allocation for diplomacy.

So that's 26-32 billion that's not going to tertiary education or Aboriginal health. It's 40 times more than what we spend on global warming (Middleton 2008:online), which is a current reality as opposed to some nebulous threat of invasion (Langmore et al. 2010: online). In fact, for slightly more money, Australia could transition to 100% renewable energy in ten years (Melbourne Energy Institute 2010: xix). Globally, military spending is more than \$1.46 trillion pa (SIPRI 2009)

* Dr Marty Branagan, lecturer in Peace Studies, University of New England, Armidale, NSW. Much of this text is from a paper delivered to the School of Humanities at the University of New England, Armidale, on 5 August 2011.

and the global MIC is the single biggest polluter on Earth (Thomas 1995). The elephant, battleship, tank and bomber in the room of global warming, therefore, is militarism, which stands in the way of any environmentally sustainable future. Is there an alternative to militarism? Is nonviolence the answer or is violence necessary to overcome violent regimes?

The Myths of Violence

If it is, it would be contrary to the history of human survival and evolution, which has generally been a history of cooperation, intelligence and planning (Boyd et al. 2003). Although the mass media gives us a twenty-four hourly summary of the worst violence on Earth, most human interactions are not violent (Anderson 2010: online). Here in Australia, in the oldest continuous culture on Earth, Aboriginal people lived for upwards of 50,000 years without invading anyone, and their society was noted as remarkably peaceful by the first Europeans here (Foley 2007: 185; Resture 2009: online). In today's world, there is a vast amount of global communication and trade in goods, information and the arts where humans interact on a daily basis without violence. There is a strong realisation that violence is detrimental to such communication and trade. So violence, though it obviously happens, is an aberration, not the norm.

Nor are we innately predisposed to violence. The Seville statement by neurophysiologists, psychiatrists, psychologists, geneticists, and other scientists at a 1986 UNESCO conference categorically denied that there is any scientific evidence to support a biological basis for violence, stating that

It is scientifically incorrect to say that war or any other violent behaviour is genetically programmed into our human nature...We conclude that biology does not condemn humanity to war, and that humanity can be freed from the bondage of biological pessimism' (Adams 1991).

This is supported by the work of Robin Grille (2005), who argues that socialisation, and in particular, parenting, is a major determinant of whether someone acts violently as an adult

To explode another myth: the world is not getting more violent all the time; in fact, a three-year study by the Human Security Center at the University of British Columbia found that both the extent and intensity of war have fallen significantly since 1990, largely due to UN interventions (La Franchi 2005: online). The study also concludes that global conflict-prevention and post-conflict peace-building efforts are becoming both more numerous and more effective. In 1990, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute reported 30 'major

armed conflicts'; in 2009, there were only 17 (Harris 2010: 37; see also Pinker 2011 and Goldstein 2011).

Jonathan Schell in *The Unconquerable World* (2003) describes two ancient and conflicting philosophies—one is the peaceful resolution of problems (which is taught to our kids at home and school and in church), which for the most part guides our daily interactions. This clashes with one of extreme, premeditated violence, a fall back position of governments for which they are constantly prepared, having massive forces and machinery permanently employed (and rarely challenged by religious hierarchies).

Nonviolence: How Most Revolutions Really Happen

According to Schell (2003: 145-185), the idea that violence is necessary to overthrow a violent regime is a political myth, with little historical evidence to support it. He cites the Glorious Revolution of 1688 in England, in which the overthrow of King James II was supposedly by an army led by the Dutchman William of Orange, but was more due to the defection of a union of parliamentarians and members of the aristocracy. The French revolution too was more determined by defections by key Paris-based regiments, with the storming of the Bastille a minor element which has been heavily romanticised.

Schell states that the American revolution was based on non-cooperation with the British, refusal to abide their judicial and tax systems, and establishment of the Americans' own governing bodies. Fighting was in *defence* of the revolution and its aim was not to defeat the British but to endure, and outlast them. Non-cooperation is a classic nonviolent tactic as is the 'constructive programme' of not just protesting but creating parallel institutions or alternative bodies and processes.

Russia had the storming of winter palace, but according to Schell the revolution had already been won by Trotsky, after a long propaganda campaign and through his dialogue with the army. There were millions in this army so theoretically the Czarist regime was impregnable, but they were largely of peasant origin, and, in turbulent times, sympathetic to communist ideals. They provided little resistance and quickly switched to supporting the communists.

In Germany, Hitler's military putsch in 1923 failed miserably. What got him into power was a steady building of parallel institutions, such as his own propaganda units, police and army (although these were undeniably violent). He established a vast movement by appealing to people's baser instincts such as racism (reminiscent of Australia in recent years). In a country reeling from its WW1 defeat, polarised between communism and the extreme right, business and to some extent the church hierarchies chose to support Hitler and his movement.

In most cases there was later considerable violence, by conspirators against others, but also against each other: In France, there were murders of aristocrats and anyone opposed to the new rulers. The Nazis of course began the Holocaust and their expansionism led to WW2. In Russia, the Bolsheviks were just one of a number of revolutionary groups (including Mensheviks and anarchists), but once the Bolsheviks were in charge they used extreme violence against their former allies. To justify this, they needed the myth that violence had been necessary in the revolution: and they made a propaganda film, in which more people were killed in the production of it than had died in the revolution (Schell 2003: 177-8).

The USSR then turned into a totalitarian police state where every aspect of life was controlled and monitored through extensive surveillance, Gulags or labour camps. It could not be brought down by US or western militarism, no matter how much they spent on it. Both sides were nuclear-armed and the world lived in a balance of terror, under the doctrine of mutually assured destruction, with the apt acronym of MAD. Internal revolutions using street violence attempted to overthrow the state in Hungary 1956, and Prague 1968 but were quickly quashed by Soviet tanks.

Realising the futility of violence against such a regime, people such as Vaclav Havel in Czechoslovakia and Lech Walensa in Poland began to study nonviolence and made a decision to try to 'live in truth', to act openly but only take on one small issue at a time, to use subtle means such as Havel's radio plays to grow a movement rather than take on the regime in its entirety and in the streets. Later, open nonviolent defiance such as the national strikes instigated by the Solidarity union in Poland opened up cracks in the periphery of the USSR system (Fig. 1). When these cracks appeared they spread quickly through the entire system precisely because it was totalitarian: all-encompassing, rigid and inflexible. The system collapsed with an expected rapidity (Fig. 2).

Despite this example of NV bringing down a huge nuclear-armed police state, the furphy persists among such notables as former opposition leader Kim Beazley that nonviolence only works against civilised opponents, such as the United States or the British in India (Summy 1995: 161). This is a curiously Anglocentric view which ignores the fact that the British did not conquer half the world through offering cucumber sandwiches and cricket but through invasions, machine guns and fictions like Terra Nullius. Many occupied peoples tried violent uprisings but were mown down by superior killing technologies e.g. 20,000 Kenyans in the Mau Mau Rebellion of the 1950s, a 'campaign notable for its atrocities in the field and its systematic torture in...concentration camps' (Burrowes 1996: 239). The later apartheid regime in South Africa modelled its interrogation systems on what the British were doing in Northern Ireland.



Figure One: Solidarity strikers in Poland



*Figure Two: 1989 Prague rally against Czechoslovakia's communist regime
(D. Turnley)*

Yet in India, nonviolence removed the veneer of respectability, and was able to 'show the world at large the fangs and claws of the [British] Government in all its ugliness and ferocity' (Kumarappa in Powers & Vogele 1997: 152), turning the international tide of opinion against the British. On a visit to London, Gandhi was asked what he thought of Western civilization. He replied 'I think it would be a good idea' (Shepard 2008, online). Although many believe that nonviolence requires saintly leaders, the Indian movement involved not just Gandhi (who had human failings and some Luddite views), but millions of people, including many active but unrecognized women such as Sarodjini Naidu. She played a pivotal role in the campaign, which finally achieved its goal of independence in 1947.

Historical Revisionism

Historical revisionism regarding nonviolence is common. As Vietnam protest veteran Ralph Summy has written, nonviolence is rarely given credit for its extraordinary achievements. Rather they are ascribed to some nebulous concept of 'people power' which somehow arises spontaneously. Its revolutions, such as the tearing down of the Iron

Curtain, are usually thought to be impossible until they actually occur; but then they are said to have been inevitable.

In South America between 1931 and 1961 nine dictatorships were overthrown by civic strikes, and later a popular movement ousted the murderous Pinochet with his death squads in Chile. However, little recognition has been given to these successes. For example, El Salvador now has ‘a national day...to commemorate the heroic patriots who failed in an armed insurrection, while the success of the nonviolent civic strike is left to the reflections of a handful of scholars’ (Summy 1995: 171).

It was not, as claimed by *Australian* journalist Greg Sheridan, the 72 day NATO bombing of Kosovo that ended the Milosevic regime. This backfired in that it rallied patriotic support behind Milosevic. What really brought him down, was a movement led by a student group Otpor who had studied and trained in nonviolence and used humour and dialogue to great effect, building an unstoppable popular uprising in 2000. And although nonviolence is decried as a middle-class option by some on the Left (despite its success in India), here it was a case of the poorest people in Europe succeeding where the might and technological sophistication of the world’s richest had failed (Summy 2000: 4-5).

In the Philippines, the brutal Marcos regime which assassinated political opponents such as Benigno Aquino was overthrown by thirty months of nonviolence after seventeen years of communist attempts at violent overthrow of the state had failed.

Moreover, these incredible victories for nonviolence were not flukes. After analyzing 323 resistance campaigns over the last century, a study published in 2008 in the journal *International Security*, found that ‘major nonviolent campaigns have achieved success 53 percent of the time, compared with 26 percent for violent resistance campaigns’ (Stephan & Chenoweth 2008: 8).

Nonviolence may not have the pageantry of war, the supersonic jets and Hollywood glorification, the wealth, status and media coverage of militarism, but its quieter, more subtle approach belies its phenomenal successes. It may be less spectacular and noisy—but this is often a sign not of lack of opposition but of better strategy.

Barack Obama, in Oslo to accept the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009, perpetuated some popular misconceptions when he said ‘I face the world as it is, and cannot stand idle in the face of threats to the American people. For make no mistake: Evil does exist in the world. A nonviolent movement could not have halted Hitler's armies’ (cited in Stoner 2009 online).

But nonviolence does not mean being idle—it is an active struggle for a better world and a more peaceful one at the same time. It acknowledges

that there is evil in the world and works to reduce this evil without adding more evil to it, the evil of violence.



Figure Three: schoolboy sabotage in Denmark

Nonviolence Versus Nazism

And let's examine the question of whether nonviolence would have succeeded against Nazi Germany, one of the most ruthless regimes of all time. In fact, it *was* used in a variety of situations and achieved some remarkable successes, perhaps nowhere more so than in occupied Denmark. Here, sabotage and calls to resistance began with schoolboys and a coalition of left-wingers and patriots (Fig. 3). They soon realised that general strikes were what worked best, as they effectively shut down the industries upon which the Nazis relied for their war effort. The Nazis could effect terrible retribution on the populace for sabotage, but they could not force the populace to work (Fig. 4). Open defiance, fuelled by underground newspapers, illegal radio broadcasts, forgery, patriotic musical gatherings, and symbolic nonviolence became so widespread that the country was virtually ungovernable by August 1944. And the country was so united in its efforts to save Jewish people from the Nazis, largely by smuggling them across to neutral Sweden that 7,220 Jewish people were saved, and only 472 were captured (Ackermann and Duvall

2000: 207-231). 90% of these survived the war because of advocacy from Danish authorities. As far as is known, no Danish Jew died in a Nazi gas chamber (Miller 1979: 137).



Figure Four: Danish strikers in Copenhagen, 1944 (Museum of Danish Resistance)

In Bulgaria, leaders of the Orthodox Church, along with farmers in the northern stretches of the country, threatened to lie across railroad tracks to prevent Jews from being deported. This popular pressure emboldened the Bulgarian parliament to resist the Nazis, who eventually rescinded the deportation order, saving almost all of the country's 48,000 Jews (Stoner 2009: online). Holland hid many of its Jews and one man even engaged in a nude protest against German clothes rationing (Fig. 5)!

In Norway, the Nazi-appointed Prime Minister Vidkun Quisling had ordered teachers to teach Nazism but an estimated 10,000 of the country's 12,000 teachers refused. A campaign of intimidation — which included sending over 1,000 male teachers to jails, concentration camps, and forced labour camps north of the Arctic Circle—failed to break the will of the teachers and sparked growing resentment throughout the country. After eight months, Quisling backed down and the teachers came home victorious (Stoner 2009: online).



Figure Five: Dutch nude protest against German clothes rationing

Despite a culture in Germany of obedience to authority, there was resistance by some priests and military personnel. The priests managed to get overturned the legislation for euthanasing intellectually disabled people (although it continued underground) but the church was often silent on oppression of Jewish people and other minorities, [as were the Allies]. The military personnel who disobeyed orders on principle were, for the most part, not executed or even demoted, but were just transferred sideways (Kitterman 1992: 249; Goldhagen 1996: 379).

Nonviolence even occurred in Berlin, in the heart of the Nazi machine. In 1943 a group of German women whose Jewish husbands had been arrested demonstrated outside the Gestapo headquarters, shouting for their husbands to be returned, despite the threat of being machine-gunned. Amazingly, they succeeded, and thousands were released, proving that even the most brutal of regimes like to preserve an image of legitimacy (Summy 1995: 176). A major finding of interrogations of German generals after the war, was of the Nazis' inability to deal effectively with nonviolent resistance 'they were experts in violence and had been trained to deal with opponents who used that method. But other forms of resistance baffled them—all the more in proportion as the methods were subtle and concealed. It was a relief to them when resistance became violent and when nonviolent forms were mixed with guerrilla action, thus making it easier to combine drastic repressive action against both at the same time' (Summy 1995: 172).

Nonviolence against Nazism could have been used much earlier, more widely and systematically. There could have been earlier and stronger sanctions against Germany and international boycotts of the corporations who were complicit in the Holocaust, such as IBM, Ford, AGFA, General Motors, Chase Manhattan Bank, Esso and Exxon (Weidmann 1990). Instead, these corporations are bigger than ever today. Yet the power of sanctions and boycotts can be seen from the international campaign led by Mthuseli Jack which played such a big and nonviolent role in ending South Africa's Apartheid regime.

In the same Oslo speech, Obama stated that 'Negotiations cannot convince al-Qaeda's leaders to lay down their arms' (in Stoner 2009: online). Again, this doesn't square with the evidence. After analyzing hundreds of terrorist groups that have operated over the last 40 years, a RAND corporation study concluded that military force is almost never successful at stopping terrorism. The vast majority of terrorist groups that ended during that period were penetrated and eliminated by local police and intelligence agencies (40%), or they reached a peaceful political accommodation with their government (43%). In other words, negotiation is clearly possible and effective (Jones & Libicki 2008).

Nonviolence: A Complex and Evolving Praxis

A fundamental misunderstanding of nonviolence is that it only involves rallies with people singing 'We shall overcome' and then being dragged passively away. Rather, there are several forms of nonviolence and many tactics. Gene Sharp (1973) has described some 198 types of tactics that have been historically used, grouped into three main areas of:

- Protest and persuasion e.g. internet campaigns, underground newspapers, radioplays
- Non-cooperation e.g. go-slows, strikes
- Nonviolent Intervention e.g. blockades, occupations.

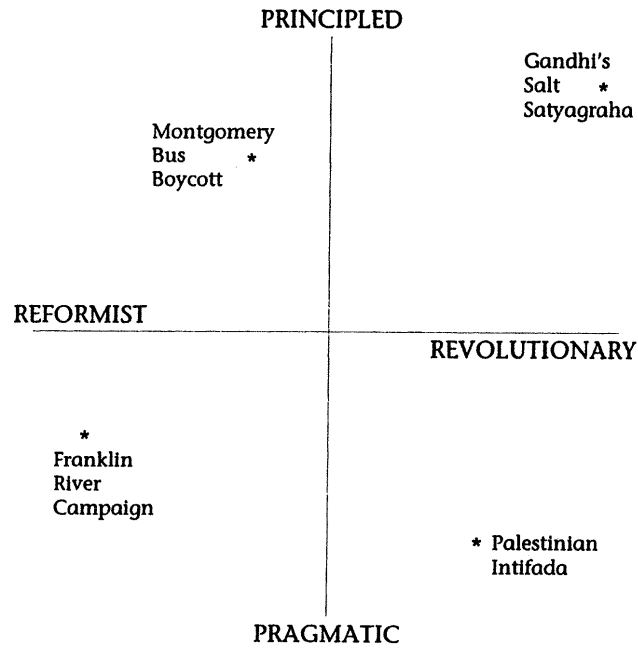


Figure 6:
Nonviolence
matrix

Australian war tax resister Robert Burrowes (1996) has categorised nonviolence into various axes of principled or pragmatic, reformist or revolutionary (Fig. 6). An inspiring activist, he advocates a Gandhian or orthodox form of principled, revolutionary nonviolence. However, there are many who do not subscribe to Gandhian nonviolence, and there has been much heated debate, particularly in the environment movement, on what constitutes nonviolence, who determines this and so on. In fact, in my experience, the only movement that fights more than the environment movement is the peace movement! I have argued elsewhere (Branagan 2008) that people may engage in a continuum of types of nonviolence and in a range of activities from spiritual practices to direct action (by which I mean blockades rather than Tony Abbott's more nebulous definition).

I have also argued that nonviolence is not a fixed praxis set in stone in 1930s India. Rather, there has been considerable evolution of nonviolence since the time of Gandhi. Much of this evolution has occurred in Australian environmental protests at places such as Chaelundi and Terania Creek and then been exported to the world. A form termed ‘active resistance’ by Timothy Doyle (2000: 58) involves militant direct actions and groups developing radical and innovative blockading technologies where people are perched in physical blockades such as tripods, monopoles, tripod villages and tree-sits are attached to objects (such as bulldozers, gates, trees and cars by chains, bike-locks, and homemade metal devices, buried in the ground and even chained and cemented in a pipe buried in the ground (Branagan 2008: 310-319; 2004a; Ricketts 2003). All this makes the words of ‘We Shall Not Be Moved’ much more realistic.

The use of protest arts and satire has also expanded in recent decades. Changes to communications technology are also greatly benefiting nonviolence, as evidenced in Burma, Iran, North Korea and Egypt, where activists have used the smaller, cheaper digital video and audio technologies available now, and communicated by mobiles, twitter, and Facebook.

In the future, we will hopefully see more centres for nonviolence research and training, and the expansion of nonviolent squadrons like Peace Brigades International. With better resourcing, theorising and practice it could easily replace militarism (which is itself being transformed already, with increasing humanitarian roles). Because nonviolence is so much cheaper it could free up billions of dollars. It therefore makes financial sense to study nonviolence.

It will be a great day when the military-industrial complex has to fill out endless forms, EOIs and grant applications and compete with each other for a few thousand dollars, while hospitals, schools and universities are given millions as a matter of course.

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