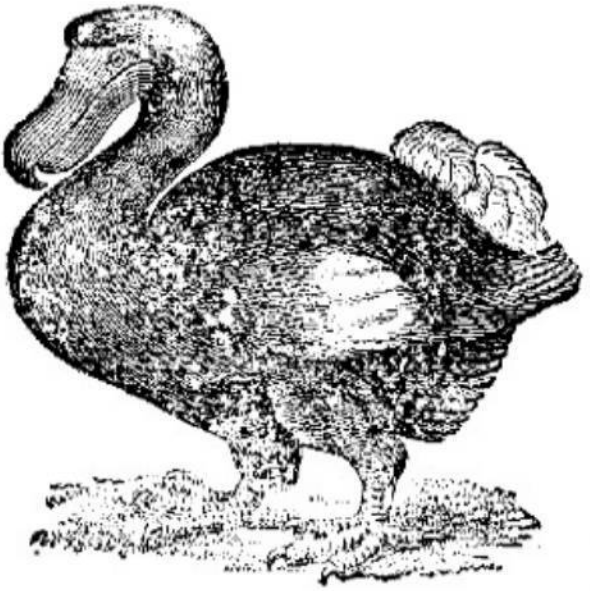
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Nonviolence and Its Violent Consequences

by William Meyers



Front cover: Dodo, from *The University Encyclopedia of Twentieth Century Knowledge*, Volume 3, page 1995. New York, The Co-operative Publication Society, 1902.

"Dodo, a large bird, belonging to the order Columbidae, or pigeons, that inhabited Mauritius in great numbers when that island was colonized in 1644 by the Dutch, but which was totally exterminated within 50 years from that date, the last record of its occurrence being in the year 1681. The dodo was a heavy bird, bigger than a turkey, incapable of flight, and entirely unlike the pigeons in general appearance. The wings were rudimentary, the legs short and stout, and the tail a tuft of soft plumes. The beak was strongly arched toward the end, and the upper mandible had a hooked point like that of a bird of prey. The dodo owed it extermination to the fact that it was good to eat and was unable to fly."

- Ibid.

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by William Meyers

The ideology of nonviolence has come to play a major role in political struggles in the United States of America and, indeed, in nations around the world. Almost every organization seeking radical change in the USA has been targeted by organizers for the nonviolence movement. Organizations like Earth First!, which originally did not subscribe to the ideology of nonviolence, have since then adopted that ideology or at least its set of rules for protest and civil disobedience. Yet nonviolence activists have put little energy into bringing their creed to establishment, reactionary, or openly violent organizations.

In this essay it will be argued that nonviolence encourages violence by the state and corporations. The ideology of nonviolence creates effects opposite to what it promises. As a result nonviolence ideologists cooperate in the ongoing destruction of the environment, in continued repression of the powerless, and in U.S./corporate attacks on people in foreign nations. To minimize violence we must adopt a pragmatic, reality-based method of operation.

I agree that violence, properly defined, is bad. It should, ideally, not be part of how humans deal with each other. I believe that a society should and can be created where no state, economic entity, or religion uses violence against people. In such a society people can achieve their individual and collective goals through voluntary cooperation. But when you scrape the make-up off the face of the ideology of Nonviolence, there you will find, grinning, the very violence it pretends to oppose.

Much of the ability of the corporate state to neutralize its opposition in the USA (and elsewhere) depends on purposeful confusion of the language used to discuss the issues. It is important to distinguish exactly what is meant by violence, not being violent, and the ideology of Nonviolence. Most people have a pretty clear idea of what violence is: hitting people, stabbing them, shooting them, on up to incinerating people with napalm or atomic weapons. Not being violent is simply not causing

physical harm to someone. But gray areas abound. What about stabbing an animal? What about allowing someone to starve because they cannot find means to pay for food? What about coercing behavior through the threat of violence? Through the threat of losing a job?

Violence as a dichotomy, with the only choices being Violence or Non-violence, is not a very useful basis for political discussion, unless you want to confuse people. Violence, the word, must be modified and illustrated to be useful for discussion. In this essay violence against animals, plants, and inanimate objects will be distinguished from violence against humans. Violence, unmodified, will always mean direct violence, actual bashing of people, and will be distinguished from the threat of violence, as when laws are passes with violent penalties attached. Also distinguished will be economic violence, as when economic activity leads to physical harm to humans, such as starvation or disease. Other methods of categorizing violence need to be distinguished, such as violent self-defense against violent predation.

The ideology of nonviolence will from this point on be distinguished from ordinary not-being violent by capitalizing it thus: Nonviolence. Most people are not-violent most of the time. Even soldiers and policemen spend more time in a not-violent state than actually committing violent acts. Most social-change activists, including environmentalists, have little or no experience with inflicting violence on other people. Yet the Nonviolence activists target social change activists with their doctrine, rather than teaching it to those policemen, soldiers, politicians and businessmen who do occasionally practice violence.

Nonviolence claims to have found a method to bring violence to an end. The fact that it has not worked at all so far has not deterred the adherents of Nonviolence from marching onward towards their millennium. If only more people would listen to us, our dreams would come true, they say. On the other hand they like to claim that non-violence has a remarkable track-record of success, with the gold-medalists of the Nonviolence Olympics usually being put forward as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King.

Nonviolence ideology states that violence begets violence. Since the goal is a non-violent society, (even if other goals are included such as economic justice, national self-determination, etc.), only nonviolent actions can be used in struggles to change society. Thus one may argue (politely), publish, vote, and assemble in protest. At the extreme edge of Nonviolence ideology lies the Holy Grail: non-violent civil disobedience.

Nonviolence has but one prescription for all social diseases. It prescribes Gandhi-brand aspirin for everything from a minor headache to

terminal cancer. But the social diseases of the real world are complex, not simple.

To gain a proper perspective on what political tools are best used to cure which social diseases, you need to be well-informed of the nature of society and of the variety of political tools that are available. It should not surprise anyone that given the complex (and advanced) natures of our social diseases, a one-size fits all political solution is not likely to succeed.

To put this in less colorful terms, to change reality you must know reality. You cannot pretend that aspects of reality do not exist just because there is nowhere to put them in your ideological box. It does not matter whether your ideology is Nonviolence, or Marxism, or Free-Market Capitalism; reality will do what it wants to do. So let us examine some aspects of reality. The goal to keep in mind is the minimization of global violence (the total amount of violence against humans on earth, including economic violence and even threats of violence).

The failure to oppose violence encourages or allows violence, and the effectiveness of opposition directly correlates with the level of discouragement of violence. But the opposition needed to stop the rape of a woman may vary greatly according to circumstances (particularly, the personality and experience of the rapist). Such situations can be only of metaphorical use in analyzing the opposition needed to stop a sugar corporation from bribing presidents and congressmen to order the US Army to murder 2 million peasants in order to take their land (as happened when the US grabbed the Philippines in 1898).

Since Nonviolence has only one solution to all problems, it can only offer degrees of Nonviolent action for any given situation. For rape I suppose you are supposed to Nonviolently interpose yourself between the rapist and the intended victim. If the rapist has a history of rapes, you can talk to him and tell him about how much better his life would be if he adopted Nonviolence as a way of living. For war against third world peasants you can Up the Level of Nonviolence. You can call for Massive Nonviolent Protest. You can sit in front of a Federal Building for a few minutes before being hauled away by the police, most probably being released after being given a ticket.

I should point out here that I have chosen two examples that I know cause ordinary people and even people who believe in Nonviolence to question its effectiveness. That is to make clear that Nonviolence as an automatic solution to social problems is just as out of touch with reality as violence. But I must emphasize that violence is counter-productive in most situations. Situations that are about to escalate into violence can often be diffused by wise intervention, by talking or physically placing oneself

between antagonists. In bar-room fights on TV usually once two people start fighting the entire bar crowd starts throwing chairs around, but in reality in most bars friends of the drunken boxers pull them apart until they can calm down.

At all levels of society self-defense discourages aggression, and is a far better principle (when extended to the idea of community defense and defense of Mother Earth) to use as a starting point than Nonviolence. The normal interpretation of self and community defense, arrived at after millennia of experimentation by almost all societies on earth, is that you can use as much violence as is necessary to bring an end to the current attack. Of course, this is a matter of judgement. It is also a favorite plea of hypocrites. The Romans used self-defense as a pretext for their village to conquer and rule a territory extending from England to Judea. The "American People" have self-defended themselves from the villages of Roanoke and Plymouth across this continent to the Pacific and on to Hawaii and the Philippines. Nevertheless, self-defense is not only a right, but a duty. A community that refuses to defend itself against aggression encourages further aggression. Under the rules of Nonviolence the aggressors always win. There is nothing to stop them from marching around the world, taking what they want, killing those who are inconvenient, and congratulating themselves.

India and Gandhi

Ideologists of all stripes like to retell history in a manner that tends to leave out details (sometimes huge details) that would bring their ideology into question. Most Americans know almost nothing of the history of the Indian subcontinent and the creation of the Indian nation. The only people with an interest in telling this story in the USA are the Nonviolence political activists. The story is fairly simple as they retell it: Gandhi returned to India after working for civil rights for Indians in South Africa. India was ruled by Great Britain. Gandhi inspired the Indian people to demand independence from Great Britain, using non-violent civil disobedience. The Brits killed some Indians and beat up others, but eventually saw the light and granted India independence. Hence Nonviolence is the solution to all problems.

Reality was much more complex.

When the British first set foot in India in the 1600's, they came as the East India Company and made a treaty with the dominant power, the Mughal empire, in an alliance against the Portugese. But the Indian continent was not one country. Not only did the Mughal empire embrace

several principalities that were in alliance with it, instead of ruled directly, but most of southern India was composed of smaller states opposed to the empire. The Mughals were Moslems, most Indians were not. The Mughal empire more or less collapsed in the 1700's, but not due to the British.

When Gandhi returned to India at the end of World War I the situation had evolved but had remarkable similarities to that of 1600. The British government ruled India, sort of. There were many semi-independent principalities suffering varying degrees of supervision by the Viceroy. The Indians were divided by language, ethnicity, religion, and caste. The westernized intellectuals had formed the Indian National Congress party in 1885. As early as 1884 the Ilbert bill put Indian judges on the same footing as European judges in Bengal; native Indians took the same exams to enter the civil service as British colonists (but the exam was administered in London; fine if you attended school in Britain, but difficult for the average Indian to take advantage of). Legislative councils with Indian members existed, though they had limited powers. It was clear that in time India would be ruled by the Indians; the Viceroy Curzon promised that before 1900. The problem with transition was not simply that there were British who liked the old system of direct bureaucratic rule and economic exploitation. Indians were not united; many aristocrats and princes favored their old arrangements with the British; and even the Congress party was divided between factions known as Moderates and Extremists. The defeat of a European power, Russia, by the Japanese in 1905 had fired India's imagination. The Bolshevik revolution and the spread of communism also played an important role in both uniting and dividing Indians between the two world wars.

More reforms were granted by the British between the wars, but independence seemed distant. Gandhi was one of the acknowledged leaders of the Congress party after he led a civil disobedience campaign and then served 6 years in jail for it. Other parties arose and were elected to the councils in different provinces. The Congress party at first refused to stand for election, then ran under the pretext of destroying the reforms from within, in order to force the independence issue. Gandhi, by his writings and actions, showed India how to gain the upper hand over the British. But it worked only because the British believed in their moral superiority. In effect Gandhi challenged the British to prove their moral superiority by withdrawing from India. Gandhi's ideology of Nonviolence was derived directly from his Jainist religious background. Suffering at the hands of the violent was a means of self-purification and showing merit for a Jainist.

In 1934 Gandhi was defeated. The civil disobedience campaign

was called off. Conservatives controlled the British government and remained firmly in control of the reformed India. Gandhi and the Congress Party accepted the gradualist British approach. The 1935 Government of India Act made Dominion status within the empire the accepted goal. Federalism would be the framework for the transition, and parliamentary institutions the form of government. Large parts of the Act were used verbatim when a Constitution was finally written in 1950.

World War II led Gandhi to support Great Britain: "We do not seek independence out of Britain's ruin." That is, the great Saint himself endorsed Indian soldiers killing Japanese and German soldiers for a good cause. This hardly squares with the ideology of Nonviolence. The British government offered the Congress Party immediate reforms and independence immediately after the war in order to retain their loyalty. They rejected the offer. Gandhi changed his mind midstream and started the "Quit India," campaign, which was regarded as treasonous by the British. Meanwhile the Moslems demanded that Pakistan be created as a country independent of India as well as Britain, an idea firmly rejected by Gandhi and Nehru. So when the war ended and the British wanted to hand over power to the Indians, they could not because the Indians were already fighting among themselves. Finally, in 1947, the British declared they were withdrawing in 1948. Gandhi and Nehru fell out with each other. Gandhi wanted to *force* the Moslems to be part of Hindu India; Nehru decided to allow the creation of Pakistan and concentrate on the Congress Party having full power to run the rest of India.

See how complex it was? This short version can only begin to show the complexity of a historical event that lasted over a century, had millions of players, and ended in one of the most violent tragedies of modern times, the Hindu versus Moslem massacres of the late 1940's. It leaves out the role of hundreds of small political parties and groups, including armed guerilla movements. But it does show that the ideology of Nonviolence played only a supporting role in the independence of India. Gandhi probably genuinely believed in Nonviolence at some points in his life, but he used it as a stage prop, and felt free to use and condone other tactics when he thought that advantageous.

Martin Luther King, Nonviolence, and the National Guard

So, on to the United States, a place where moral smugness takes second seat to no one, not even the British. And low and behold, the Nonviolent activists parade out another Saint, one Martin Luther King. A good man, in my book, but not someone who ended Jim Crow through Nonviolence.

Jim Crow (racism) was itself a complex social phenomena, composed ultimately of social beliefs, customs, violent tactics, and laws that evolved over a long period of time. The end of Jim Crow (and it isn't totally over yet) came about as a result of a complex set of individual decisions made by real human beings. Black Americans had fought back against various aspects of Jim Crow ever since the era of Reconstruction. Many had simply fled the southern version, finding the northern version easier to put up with.

Martin Luther King certainly played a prominent role in opposition to segregation. But so did the Black Muslims and Black Panthers, the Communist Party USA and the proliferation of other black nationalist, Leninist, Anarchist and New Left groups. Individual acts of defiance, most of them forgotten by everyone but their actual participants, were probably even more important, as were the acts of communal self-defense we usually refer to as race riots. Black military, veterans had used their military skills after every war they had fought in to attempt to assert their rights; the large number of black veterans returning from Vietnam were a very real danger to the government, given the explosive social mixture of the times.

However much credit you may want to assign to various groups or types of action for their effectiveness of ending racial discrimination during the 1960's, it is simply factually inaccurate to give the leading role to the ideology of Nonviolence. The leading role went to the National Guard, a group backed up by the Army, Navy, and Marines; if necessary by nuclear weapons. When Presidents of the United States decided to send in the National Guard to desegregate schools in southern states, the racists had little choice but to back down. Whether the President, Congress or Supreme Court (in passing and enforcing civil rights laws) did it out of the goodness of their hearts, or because they feared a violent revolution that would overthrow the government, or because some marchers took oaths of nonviolence, in the end it was violence and the threat of violence that ended segregation. The same National Guard that walked black children into public schools was a part of a military establishment murdering

civilian women and children at Vietnam at the same time, so don't worry that I'm giving them undue praise. I am simply describing a complex reality as accurately as possible in a short space.

In sum, the situation in which Martin Luther King played a major role showed that violence does not always beget violence. The National Guard, an instrument of violence, was used to end an ongoing tide of violence, Jim Crow. As a related example, which I won't present in detail here, the Black Panthers, by buying shotguns and using them, caused a major drop in the level of violence the Oakland Police were using against blacks. Gandhi was willing to go to jail for his beliefs; the Panthers were willing to die, if necessary, to defend their community. And many were murdered by the police, FBI, and Cointelpro.

Eco-sabotage and Other Gray Areas

If Nonviolence activists were content to preach their gospel to the military, the police, the capitalists and other violent and oppressive groups, I would not need to write this essay. They focus their efforts, however, on purifying groups that are working for social change. In no case I know of have they targeted a violent group and convinced it to not be violent. Instead they target groups that are already not violent and imbue them with a set of rules that reduce their effectiveness. In at least one instance, the White Train movement of the early 1980s, it was later revealed that one of the Nonviolence activists was actually an undercover agent for the Portland police. This kindly looking, white-haired man delighted in explaining how almost any action designed to stop the White Train (carrying nuclear warheads) was violent, and hence how the only usable tactic was silently witnessing the passing of the train. His tactics for manipulating the groups involved were indistinguishable from the tactics used by Nonviolence activists to turn Earth First! in the period from 1988 to 1991 from being a revolutionary group that was genuinely wild and dangerous to the corporations raping the earth into a toothless poodle competing with the Sierra Club for strokes from society's masters.

While they may walk into a non-Nonviolence group and declare that they are now making the rules and telling everyone what to think (even Leninists seem relatively non-arrogant compared to most of the leaders of the Nonviolence movement), Nonviolence activists, usually focus their tactics on gray areas. Often the gray areas include the question of excluding (violently, if necessary!) groups and individuals that have decided against taking Nonviolence oaths from taking part in decision making, civil disobedience, and even protest.

However, a clearer example of the effects of Nonviolence is how they attack the question of sabotage. This question arose with regard to Earth First!, which included sabotage within the range of tactics used during the 1980's.

Sabotage was a way of life in Earth First! circles in 1989. Sure, much of it was petty, more a matter of making the participants feel empowered than effectively stopping earth-rape. But it was a part of our lives; I was there, I saw it and did it, I do not regret it. Perhaps starting earlier, but certainly well underway by 1988, there was an influx of federal agents (and perhaps private agents hired by public relations firms) into Earth First! Coincidently, or maybe not, Nonviolence activists who did not subscribe to the Earth First! credo, "No compromise in defense of mother earth," also started appearing and arguing against sabotage and other Earth First! tactics that they considered violent, like running. Yes, running, but if I used that as an extended example most people would think I was writing satire rather than a serious essay.

According to Nonviolence activists sabotage is a form of violence. It feeds the cycle of violence by giving the sabotaged entities an excuse for their own violence. They confuse the issue by saying that the actions of physical tools (like swinging a sledgehammer) is the same as violence against persons. Next thing we know they'll be prohibiting dancing because people swing their arms and hips to dance.

Without a doubt sabotage is illegal. But legality has little to do with violence or its minimization. Many not-violent activities are illegal, and many violent activities ranging from hockey to US troops shooting unarmed peasant children in the Third World are not illegal.

Without a doubt, in fact by definition, sabotage violates property rights. But since the Nonviolence activists are not generally members of the Libertarian Party, you would think they would not be that concerned with protecting corporate and government owned property (it is very rare that eco-sabotage harms the property of individual real persons).

In fact, when questioned, Nonviolence activists consider sabotage violent for one of two reasons: they are really police agents charged with protecting corporate property, or they think violence to non-animate physical objects is the same thing as violence to human beings.

I submit that building a house with a hammer and nails is not a violent act. I reject the idea that sabotage is a violent act. I do not believe that even if it does sometimes result in violent reprisals by violent corporations that the correct way to determine a course of action that may save Mother Earth is by failing to act because our opponents have a history of violence.

Consider a US invasion of a Third World country (I'll generalize). Army troops are charged with murdering peasants who are trying to take back their land stolen by US corporations that are growing Monsanto-brand genetically engineered opium poppies to make heroin to sell in America's ghettos to raise money for the CIA to help it help US companies grab more peasant land. A woman who has been forced into prostitution by the soldiers, after her captors have fallen asleep, sabotages their guns so they will have to wait a few days while they get shiny new guns to kill more peasants. Clearly the woman has, at least temporarily, lessened the cycle of violence. But Nonviolence activists cannot be wrong, so there must be something wrong with my example. Is sabotaging weapons violent or Nonviolent or not-violent? Dance on the head of that pin, if you will. And if you are sane, and conclude damaging weapons used to murder people is not violence, then what of the next gray area: damaging machines that are being used to destroy our earth?

Fallback Nonviolence arguing position: Nonviolence is a universal truth, but maybe the Third World is different than the US where we have free speech and democracy and a big middle class and respect for property rights. And please don't come to the next meeting, and you can't be in our affinity group, and you can't speak from stage at any rally we are able to control.

By 1993 Earth First! had adopted Nonviolence as a principle superior to "No compromise in defense of mother earth." The mental gymnastics required for this are: violence is destroying mother earth, so she can only be saved by Nonviolence, therefore we must not compromise Nonviolence in our defense of mother earth.

Elections, Courts, and Violence

Losing momentum as it became just another eco-protest group (one with much more radical theories, sometimes referred to as Deep Ecology) in practice, Earth First!, with the approval of its new set of Nonviolence leaders, entered into alliances with groups using law suits to defend the environment.

That is not bad strategy, in some ways, but it's a bizarre application of Nonviolence, if you think about it. (But then Nonviolence requires a great deal of Nonthinking.)What are courts, police, and government but instruments of violence? Consider the nature of a legal victory in cases in which a judge has ruled in environmentalists' favor and issued an injunction against timber harvesting. What does an injunction mean? It means that you do what the judge says, or the armed might of the

government will force you to do it, or punish you for not doing it, using means that cannot be rationalized as not-violent, much less Nonviolent. You may enjoy seeing a timber corporation threatened by violence by a federal judge, I certainly do, but don't tell me that is Nonviolence.

The only way out of this conundrum for the Nonviolence apostles is to pretend that government is not violent. And it usually is not violent to the bourgeois gentlehommes who make up the ruling class. These men and women are realists, they aren't going to shoot it out with the government. If the rare honest judge enforces the Endangered Species Act, these men can wait until their money can buy elections and representatives and judges to gut the Act. I don't object to winning a stay for the forests through litigation; I object to Nonviolence activists labeling sabotage as violence and court orders as Nonviolence. But then Gandhi was a lawyer, and what rational person can fathom a system created by a Jainist lawyer? A system that says that if the forests must suffer to end the cycle of violence, so be it?

Declawing the Revolution From Within

The ideology of Nonviolence is not merely mistaken in attempting to apply one solution to fix all problems. It is an ideology used by our police state to make opposition to the violent policies of our government ineffective. The police use Nonviolence as a method of controlling potentially troublesome social change groups. Many of the Nonviolence advocates that float around the social change movements are on police payrolls, or should be. Many have been trained by public relations agencies, which spotted the tactic as a very productive one for their corporate clients.

Their tactics are revealing, but simplistic. They accuse anyone they disagree with of being violent. They scare their followers with stories of the terrible fates in store for anyone who brings down the wrath of the police or the middle class voters on their precious Nonviolent affinity groups or their cause. They hold secret meetings among themselves to reach a consensus for "Nonviolence Codes" that would be more accurately called "Do Nothing," codes. Then they declare an issue to be their turf, and declare that anyone joining in on the issue must accept their dictatorial "consensus" decisions.

They confuse and manipulate people with a bizarre mechanics of consensus. The key rule is that one person may block consensus, that is, if even one person in the group objects to an action, then that action cannot be done. This rule is extremely loaded in the direction of no action at all.

Then again, just try to block the pre-determined consensus in favor of Nonviolence. Explain that you understand that the ideology and practice of Nonviolence is in fact a violent ideology because it encourages State and Corporate violence. Watch the claws and fangs pop out of the Nonviolence folk. They have a lot of pent-up anger, and they would much rather take it out on an honest activist than on the people who are actually destroying the earth and murdering its peasant stewards. Be careful, they'll probably report you to the police. They probably are the police.

Playing with the Media

One common argument against more militant forms of protest and action is that these will alienate the media and the general public, "upon whose support the ultimate success of our campaign depends." While this argument is used in many contexts for many political purposes, it is especially used by Nonviolence propagandists to maintain their control of the acts of political (and environmentalist) groups.

Again, a little critical thinking will reveal that Nonviolence, by refusing to look at reality or meaningfully address gray areas, sets its hand firmly in league with Violence. The usual argument is that any violence or destruction of public property will result in negative coverage by the Press, and a negative reaction from Middle Class Americans, who vote in elections and secretly subscribe to the Jainist political principle of Nonviolence.

When you hear people make this argument, you know that their brains have been thoroughly washed.

The Media in America is not one thing, but it is pretty close. It is almost all owned by large, in some cases international, corporations; we'll ignore the seldom-heard alternative media here, except to say that it needs to be supported and expanded. The Corporate Media is Violence, because it is Money. It constantly promotes violence against the powerless and those who have resources that corporations want to grab as their own. It glorifies war; look at how it covered the War Against Iraq and the War Against Serbia and the War Against the Nicaraguan people. It glorifies violence; flip on the TV and watch Pro Wrestling. Open the newspaper and read about the football and hockey games.

The only times the corporate media is against Violence is when it does not serve the greater ends of corporations. When a division of US Marines grabs peasant lands in Central America the media cheers; when some oppressed workers in the US grab some canned goods during a riot, that same media deplores violence. When anyone shoots a cop or lawyer

the media deplores violence; when the lawyers and cops are doing the shooting and hanging the media cheers.

Of course the media is going to portray Earth First!, ELF, the IWW and all groups that threaten corporate control and domination in any negative way they can. Sure they'll call them violent at the least excuse. And the Nonviolence Activists will break solidarity with those who are trying to end violence, and join hands with the corporate media denouncing "violent" activities.

Can the media turn the middle class, even the working class, against reformers and revolutionaries? Sure! That's their job. That's one of the things their sponsoring corporations pay them for. But it isn't the violence or Nonviolence of the activists that is being targeted. Nor is it the natural Nonviolence of the people that is being appealed to. People love righteous violence, and with good cause. They applaud it in the movie theaters, they glorify it in patriotic speeches. What must be kept clear is the righteousness of the cause. Nonviolence does not add to (or subtract from) the righteousness of any cause. Willingness to fight and, if unlucky, die for a cause is what adds to its righteousness, in public perception.

People were willing to kill for Racism, but almost no one could be found who was willing to die for racism. Once blacks started arming themselves and had the support (at times) of the National Guard, racists proved themselves to be cowards. They did not care about racism enough to die for it; but the Black Panthers were willing to die to end it. If the Black Panthers had listened to the Nonviolence police and the corporate media, we'd still have Jim Crow today, with its ongoing tide of violence. And the Nonviolence police would be patting themselves on the back, saying "Racism is bad and violent, but at least we did not become like those violent folk."

Becoming the Enemy

One of the most effective guilt trips borrowed by the Nonviolence police from Jainest religious beliefs is the argument that if you use violence, you will become violent. This cuts two ways: it appeals to the Christian idea of tainting of the soul, and to the pragmatic reality of habitual behavior.

On the metaphysical side, there is the contrary belief that things become their opposite. In the orient this is expressed by the Yin-Yang symbol. Under this belief system one can expect Nonviolence to create or turn into its opposite, Violence. It has a pragmatic reality basis in this case: refusing to defend yourself encourages predation, which in turn can

convince a community that they had better become predatory themselves. The ancient Greeks also noted this phenomena, giving it the term enantiodromia, the tendency of a thing to become its opposite.

The real world is much too complex for simplistic metaphysical ideas to offer much in the way of guidance. Consider all of the Japanese soldiers who returned home after World War II. Many had not simply killed men in war, but had murdered civilians as well. Yet after the war Japan became a remarkably non-violent society. Clearly the peaceful men who went to war did not become compulsive violence freaks because they followed violent orders for a period of time.

But then, they were not in power. If anything encourages violence, it is unrestrained power. The Bolshevik Party in the Soviet Union offers a good example. They were never opposed to violence; once in power they became increasingly violent until the 1950's. When Stalin died and Khrushchev gained power, he put an end to the violence, with little opposition.

Not only are humans complex in general, but they vary markedly from one individual to the next. Exposure to violence, or chance participation in violence, have little predictive value in determining how violently an individual will act in the future. A mild-mannered father or mother will usually go to any end to defend their children from attack; and they should. Nonviolence activists who refuse to violently defend their own children when necessary are more inhumanly monstrous than any predator.

In society, politics, and personal relations we are always dealing with multiple variables and complex interactions. It is often difficult to predict what the outcome of a decision will be. The simplification of Nonviolence appeals to people who have been confused by complexity. They act as if chopping some wood for kindling will set them on an inevitable path towards being a habitual ax murderer.

From what I have seen, in the real world subscribing to Nonviolence ideology is a symptom of a dogmatic personality, and history has shown that all dogmas are inherently violent in nature. The Indian Non-violence clique of Gandhi and Nehru had no qualms about sending troops with tanks to end the independence of Junagadh and Hyderabad in 1948 in order to consolidate their control of India.

Minimizing Violence: Organizational Stances

More than a critique of Nonviolence is needed if we are to make an effective defense of Mother Earth and humanity against the predators

who run the world's corporations, governments, and religions. Here, however, the space allowed limits me to critiquing Nonviolence and offering the following suggestions.

By now hopefully it is clear that Nonviolence is not the best way to minimize violence. Neither, of course, is any ideology that glorifies violence.

The correct strategy is to minimize violence while we work towards our other goals. This requires that we both minimize the ability of the military-industrial-governmental complex to use violence and do that with a minimum of violence ourselves.

However, it should be clear that sabotage is not violence when used to stop violence by institutions. Sabotage must be revitalized as the basic positive action that can be taken prior to a situation where true radical reform can be created.

Self-defense must be a right we reserve to ourselves. Otherwise we invite violent attacks on ourselves, our families, our organizations, and our communities. Self-defense keeps violent institutions in check. It must be combined with genuine solidarity. We must stand in solidarity with the ecosystems that are under attack, and with our fellow human beings who are under attack. Even the American middle class understands and approves of the right to self-defense.

We must use better judgement than we have in the past. We must use the right tool for each job. We cannot let ourselves be blinded by ideology.

We must use violent means, like voting in elections and filing law suits, when necessary. We must take away the power of corporations to control the government, so that the government can itself be reformed and eventually abolished in favor of voluntary community cooperation.

The path forward is not easy, but drop the load of dogma called Nonviolence off your back, and you have a lot better chance of getting where you want to go.

Not all groups or individuals must act in the same way or on the same issues. Respect your brother and sister activists's work, but don't let them stop you from doing what you know you have to do.

Model Resolutions Against Violence and Non-violence

Many groups may want to make it clear that, as a group, they are not going to use violence as a tool. I agree that for many groups that is a reasonable thing to do, but usually at that point some Nonviolence activists get the group to tie their hands with the cords of a not-well thought out

Nonviolence Code.

I suggest something like the following resolution or bylaw be adopted in those situations:

"We are resolved that our group will not use or instigate violence against human beings as a means to achieve its ends. However, we recognize the right of people to self-defense and community defense."

If a group really understands how Nonviolence has violent consequences, it might adopt a resolution such as:

"Whereas our group is against violent attacks upon individuals and violent attacks upon the environment, and wants to minimize such violence as quickly as possible and abolish it as soon as possible, it is resolved that we reject the ideology of Nonviolence, which encourages violence by unjust institutions."

William Meyers — an abbreviated political biography

William Meyers was born at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina in 1955. His thinking was highly influenced by the struggle for black civil rights in the south. In high school he joined the McGovern for President campaign in 1972 and participated in protests against the Vietnam War. In college he helped organize a protest against the presentation of an honorary degree to Defense Secretary Harold Brown. Starting in 1979 he began organizing and participating in civil disobedience against nuclear weapons. In 1981 he helped start an anti-nuclear weapons newspaper in Seattle. In 1984 he went to Germany to protest against the US's deployment of cruise and Pershing missiles, speaking at rallies and joining the Autonomen (anarchists) in fighting German security forces. Back in the US he helped organize No Business As Usual day in Seattle and began teaching techniques developed by the Autonomen to American anarchists and activists. In 1985 he also became active as an anarcho-syndicalist with Workers Solidarity Alliance and the Industrial Workers of the World, as well as promoting *Fifth Estate*'s and Earth First!'s critique of industrial society. In 1988 he founded III Publishing, specializing in anarchist fiction. He was an organizer of Redwood Summer in 1990, then a staff worker at the IWW Clearinghouse in San Francisco from 1991 to 1994. In addition his writings have been published in numerous magazines and reprinted and circulated internationally.

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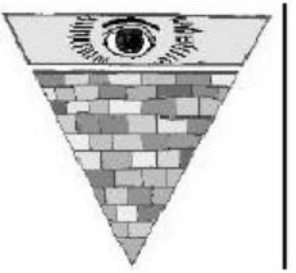
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