How Nonviolence Works

Allan Cumming
The original edition of this booklet was dedicated to the memory of Fernando Pereira, Greenpeace photographer and nonviolent activist, murdered aboard the Rainbow Warrior in Auckland Harbour, July 10th, 1985.

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Allan Cumming

On 13th November 1990, Garry Holden and his daughter Jasmine, devoted workers for the Independent State of Aramoana, and 11 other residents and friends of the settlement, were killed in the Aramoana shootings. Chiquita Holden, Garry’s other daughter and the first citizen born in the Independent State of Aramoana, was seriously wounded along with two others.

I would like to dedicate this new, combined edition, to those friends and colleagues who died or were otherwise affected on that day.
Introduction to the new edition

- Tim Jones, Coal Action Network Aotearoa

Allan Cumming’s two booklets on nonviolent direct action, Understanding Nonviolence and How Nonviolence Works, were first published in 1983 and 1985 respectively, and are now being made available in a new, combined edition by Coal Action Network Aotearoa, which is committed to using nonviolent direct action as part of its campaigns against new and expanded coal mining, including lignite mining, in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Why a new edition, and why now?
The early 1980s, when these booklets were written, were a time of rapid political and social change in Aotearoa. The 1980s opened with the conservative nationalistic Government of Robert Muldoon, which decided to let the 1981 Springbok Tour of New Zealand go ahead in a (successful) bid to win the 1981 General Election, and initiated a series of heavily subsidised resource exploitation projects collectively known as “Think Big”.

In 1984, the Muldoon National Government was replaced by the Lange-Douglas Labour Government which, under its cloak of progressive social and disarmament policies, implemented a hard-right economic agenda dedicated to selling off public assets, cutting back social welfare provisions, and transferring wealth into the hands of a small coterie of private business interests.

In response, the early 1980s was also a time of intense protest activity. The anti-Springbok Tour protest movement was a catalyst for both the anti-racism movement and for that movement’s challenges to both the Springbok Tour protest movement itself and to other movements, such as the peace and anti-nuclear movement.

Now we have a New Zealand Government which, as if in some genetic experiment gone horribly wrong, combines the worst features of the Muldoon and Lange-Douglas eras. On the one hand, the Key
Government’s utter contempt for the natural environment is allied with a rapacious desire to exploit every fossil fuel resource possible. On the other hand, the Government is pursuing a programme of transferring publicly owned assets to private hands. Hence, the Key Government has fostered and subsidised a nationwide assault by mining interests on the natural environment, with serious environmental consequences both locally and for the world’s climate.

Communities and groups are rising up in protest against these plans – but effective action requires effective tools, and effective use of nonviolent direct action requires knowledge of its strategies, techniques and potential pitfalls. In the years since these booklets were first published, the techniques of nonviolent direct action have to some extent been professionalised by groups that specialise in taking high-profile small-group direct actions. There is most certainly a place for such actions, but these two booklets make the techniques and philosophy of nonviolent direct action available to anyone who wants to use them.

I made a small contribution to the original editions, and I am delighted to have the chance to contribute to this new edition. I hope it will be useful to campaigns and campaigners all around Aotearoa.

About Coal Action Network Aotearoa
Coal Action Network Aotearoa (CAN Aotearoa) is a group of climate justice campaigners committed to fighting the continuation of coal mining in Aotearoa New Zealand. CAN Aotearoa’s objectives are to:

1. Phase out coal mining and coal usage within 20 years, initially by opposing new and expanded coal mines.
2. Promote a cultural change so that mining and using coal are unacceptable.
3. Work towards a society where people and the environment are not exploited for profit.
4. Work towards a socially just transition to a coal-free Aotearoa New Zealand.

Find out more at: http://coalactionnetworkaotearoa.wordpress.com/, or join the CAN Aotearoa supporters list by emailing: coalactionnetwork@gmail.com
NOW WHAT DO WE DO?

FORWARD
This is a book about nonviolence. A technique of social change that has existed for as long as we have records, yet one which is virtually unknown. A technique that has toppled dictatorships and has forced a town council to paint a pedestrian crossing outside a school\(^1\). A technique used by peasants, students, workers, and the middle classes around the world. A technique of social change that works.

Specifically, this is a book about nonviolent action theory — why nonviolence achieves results, how it works, and how it can fail. It is a book dealing with the underlying principles of nonviolent direct action, rather than the organising methods normally associated with the technique. It is an attempt to illustrate why the technique works, rather than describing tools which can be used.

Why a book on nonviolent theory? Surely a book on tools and techniques would be more useful? There are two reasons for my decision to concentrate on the “theoretical” rather than the practical. First, there are already available in Aotearoa\(^2\) several books on social change tools. I would especially recommend Rachel Bloomfield *People Organising for Power*\(^3\). However, there are few books dealing in depth with the theory behind those tools.

Second, knowledge of the tools, while useful, does not compensate for lack of knowledge of the theory. Knowing how to organise a nonviolent demonstration is good — knowing when to use the
demonstration, or when not to use it, is better. The use of the best nonviolent tactic at the wrong time can destroy a nonviolent campaign just as the use of violence can. Understanding how nonviolent direct action works is essential to anyone planning or participating in a nonviolent campaign.

I also intend to dispel some common misconceptions about nonviolence. Of social change techniques, it is probably the most widely discussed and least understood. People claim that nonviolence is for those who are not “committed” enough to “go all the way”, or that it only works against “friendly” opponents; that it means “only talking or bargaining” – the list goes on. I hope to be able to correct some of the more obvious misconceptions, and promote a better understanding of nonviolence.

To understand nonviolence, it is necessary to understand its underlying dynamics. I’ve also looked at the nonviolent theory of power, and the planning of a nonviolent direct action campaign, as a framework to fit the theory of nonviolent dynamics into. I have included a short section defining some terms commonly used in discussions on nonviolence.

Nonviolence is gaining popularity and respect worldwide — largely as a result of the growth of a determined anti-nuclear movement in the United States and Europe. Increasingly, groups in Aotearoa are using nonviolence training to enable them to become more effective. I hope that the thoughts I have set out here will encourage people and social change organisations to look at nonviolent direct action as a technique they can adapt to their struggle — a technique that will help them towards a successful conclusion to their campaign.
References

1 “Harold Priestley in his Voice of Protest quotes as an example 500 villagers of Redbourn in Hertfordshire, who on 30 October 1967, walked to and fro over the zebra crossing in the High Street while traffic piled up on both sides, because they wanted a controlled crossing that could be worked from the curb.”

General Jorge Ubico, who had ruled Guatemala since 1931, was overthrown by a nonviolent civilian insurrection in 1944. Ubico was once quoted in Time magazine as saying “I am like Hitler—I execute first and give trials afterwards…”

2 Throughout this book I have used Aotearoa as the correct name of “New Zealand” except where referring to the institutions of the predominantly white society.

3 Bloomfield, People Organising for Power, is out of print at present although many libraries hold copies.
Christchurch, August 1981. A confrontation between the riot police and the anti-apartheid movement during the Rugby Test between the South African Springboks and the New Zealand All Blacks.
Some Definitions and Some Controversies

Nonviolence is probably one of the most misused and abused terms in the vocabulary of social change. Everyone seems to have their own definition, often tailor-made to suit their arguments. In order to avoid confusion I will look at the various terms encountered in nonviolent action, and set out my understanding of those terms, while accepting that no one definition is the “correct” one. I will also look at some of the areas of debate within nonviolence, and how they relate to its dynamics.

“Nonviolence” and “non-violence”
Defining nonviolence is difficult because of the wide range of meanings given to the word. Many definitions treat the word as the negative of violence — “non-violence” — defining violence then allowing “non-violence” to mean everything else. Other definitions treat nonviolence as a positive force in its own right. People using it this way often omit the hyphen — as I have in this book. Let us look at each in turn.

“Non-violence”
Most people readily accept that violence is the sort of thing we do in war — killing, injuring, or imprisoning human beings. Non-violence is defined as any action that is not violent. This definition of non-violence is simple, easy to understand, and offends no-one. The difficulty with this definition is in defining violence. Does it include mental harassment, or depriving people of their possessions, for example? The inability to define violence can lead to interesting results. 58% of American males felt that burning Draft Cards was violent, and 57% felt that police shooting
looters was not, according to a 1969 survey.¹

“Nonviolence”
The other view claims that nonviolence exists in its own right — not defined by, and certainly not limited by, definitions of violence. An act may be violent, it may be nonviolent, or it may be something else entirely. Definitions of violence are irrelevant in this approach.

Most definitions of nonviolence will include some aspect of “non-harm” to the opponent. This is the quality that Gandhi referred to as “ahimsa”, often translated as “nonviolence”, although non-harm is probably a more accurate translation.² Causing both physical and mental suffering is therefore excluded from our definition.

Second, nonviolence includes a positive approach to conflict. It recognises conflict as natural within society, and maintains that it can be dealt with in a positive and “non-harming” fashion. This alternative “nonviolent resolution of conflict” is central to the political use of nonviolence.

Third, nonviolence separates the opponent as a person from the issue being opposed. This means attacking the problems within society at their source, and being clear that the person who holds views opposing our own has value as an individual — even though we may strongly oppose that person’s views and behaviour.

Fourth, nonviolence extends the principles of non-harm to the others in our movement, as well as to our opponents. This commonly leads to a non-hierarchical style of working, use of consensus as a decision-making process, and a higher level of interpersonal support than is normally found in political groups.

Fifth, nonviolence incorporates, for many people, an integrated view of the world, both personal and political. It provides a framework for day-to-day living, as well as a means of achieving social justice.

This second definition of nonviolence is clearly more narrow in some respects (things are not “nonviolent” simply because
they are “not violent”), yet in other ways it is far broader since it incorporates factors that the first definition doesn’t even consider.

Some terms and controversies

Openness

Nonviolent campaigns are often described as “open” in nature, a term which causes much debate and confusion. What is “openness” and why is it often part of nonviolent direct action? Open organisation means that there is a commitment to planning and acting in a publicly visible fashion, in contrast to the “closed door” nature of many campaigns and organisations. It means that meetings are open to any who wish to attend, and decisions are made at those meetings rather than later in closed committees. It means that actions are organised openly, with the opponent and third parties such as the police informed of decisions that may affect them. It means that actions such as sabotage or occupations are performed openly, with those involved accepting responsibility for the actions.

What are the advantages of openness in a direct action campaign? First, since there are no decisions made which must be kept secret, the constant paranoia over informers and spies that is so much a part of many campaigns, ceases to exist. If there are spies, they can learn nothing that the campaign will not announce to the opponent anyway, so their presence does not matter.

Second, involvement in actions will be far higher, with a greater level of commitment, if many are involved in the planning of the action. It is a direct contrast with the situation where a small group plans an action, and people take part as “cannon fodder” without any participation in deciding their role.

Third, openness provides a psychological advantage to the campaign. From a media perspective, a campaign that clearly has nothing to hide is “good” while the opponent, usually a company or government department used to operating without public surveillance, is immediately in the wrong. Does it have something to hide?
Openness has many advantages for a campaign, yet it also has its drawbacks. Clearly decisions will take longer to make in large groups, although the quality of the decisions often cancels this disadvantage. More important, especially with civil disobedience actions, prior knowledge on the part of the police and opponent may prevent an action. In this case there are two options. Either care can be taken to plan actions that are not vulnerable in this way, or the final details such as time, date or location can be left to a smaller group — after the style of the action has been openly decided.

Direct action
One phrase often used in both nonviolent and violent traditions of protest is “direct action”. Particularly loved by various anarchist and student groups in the 1960s, the term is central to

Aramoana, January 1980. Following the declaration of the Independent State of Aramoana, a border post was set up on the only road to the site.
an understanding of nonviolent dynamics. The usual meaning of the phrase today is “action which... realises the end desired, so far as this lies in one's power or the power of one’s group”.  

Direct action excludes actions aimed at influencing third parties or raising public awareness, which are referred to as indirect actions. It includes only those actions that directly affect the injustice being opposed (see figure 1).

David Wieck gives an example in his article, “The Habit of Direct Action”:

“To take a homely example. If the butcher weighs one’s meat with his thumb on the scale, one may complain about it and tell him he is a bandit who robs the poor, and if he persists and one does nothing else, this is mere talk; one may call the Department of Weights and Measures, and this is indirect action; or one may, talk failing, insist on weighing one’s own meat, bring along a scale to check the butcher’s weight, take one’s business somewhere else, help to open a co-operative store, etc., and these are direct actions.”  

The link between direct action and nonviolent philosophy is clear. Nonviolent theory claims that every person has power to achieve change through direct participation in, or withdrawal from, the decision making process. Direct action is one method of exercising that power.

This is not to suggest that we should use only direct action in a nonviolent campaign. Indirect actions such as the mobilisation of public opinion on an issue are very important and should not be overlooked. Indeed the vast majority of activities within any political campaign would not be direct actions as described above.

Yet direct action has one vital advantage over indirect acts. Because it is always a direct intervention in the situation it cannot be ignored. It is possible to delay, to ignore, or to stall deputations and petitions. Direct action such as a strike or a blockade cannot be ignored. It forces the opponent to recognise you, and to make some response.
Civil disobedience

Another term which has caused confusion in Aotearoa, largely as a result of the way it was misused during the 1981 Springbok Tour, is “Civil Disobedience”. This can be defined as the deliberate breaking of the law in an open and nonviolent manner, such that the activist is liable to some punishment. The much-quoted statement that the anti-tour campaign would include civil disobedience — and would “go to the edge of the law” — left many with the impression that somehow it was possible to commit acts of civil disobedience without actually breaking the law. This is impossible. The very term means that the law will be broken, and broken deliberately. It is possible that the organisers of the anti-tour demonstrations wished to involve people who would not deliberately break the law, and this is valid — but it is not civil disobedience.

Although civil disobedience must involve some breaking of the law, the precise definition of which law is harder to reach agreement on. Some would suggest that only the deliberate breaking of unjust laws (eg draft laws) should be included. Others maintain that the breaking of “neutral” laws to make a point can also be included. The trespass laws broken in an office occupation are not the source of injustice being opposed, for example.

Another area of disagreement is whether it is possible to have violent civil disobedience, or whether “civil” implies a necessary level of firm politeness. Most people would agree that the “civil” distinguishes the action from mere breaking of the law in some way, which would exclude actions such as riots.

There is debate as to whether arrests resulting from civil disobedience should be challenged in court. Some claim that true civil disobedience recognises the authority of the law and the courts, and therefore guilty pleas should be entered. Others claim that observance of a higher moral code, as implied in civil disobedience, leaves open the right to challenge the arrests. Still others claim that the courtroom is a legitimate forum for further airing the issues.

Within the realm of nonviolent direct action, it can be assumed that civil disobedience will:
a) Involve the deliberate breaking of either an unjust, or a “neutral”, law;
b) Involve the deliberate courting of arrest and acceptance of the consequences of the action (leaving open the option of challenging the validity of the arrests in court);
c) Be open and nonviolent in nature;
d) In some way highlight the injustice that is being opposed.

One common confusion is between “direct action” and “civil disobedience”. Many people assume the two are of the same. This is not so. Civil disobedience may include direct action. Direct action may include civil disobedience. Neither necessarily assumes the other (see figure 1)

**Destruction of property**

Is it possible for destruction of property to be acceptable in a nonviolent campaign? The fact that property damage is illegal is not enough to prevent it being part of nonviolent action campaigns since these will sometimes involve the deliberate breaking of the law. We must look back at our definition of nonviolence.

Since we accept that nonviolence includes the principle of Ahimsa (non-harm) we must ask ourselves whether property can be harmed. Does a building have feelings which can be hurt? Can it feel pain? These suggestions are clearly ridiculous. It is not the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legal Actions</th>
<th>Civil Disobedience</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indirect (symbolic) Actions</strong></td>
<td>Street March (with permits)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Die-in on city street to protest against nuclear weapons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Direct Actions</strong></td>
<td>Boycott of a company’s product (eg the Nestlé Boycott)</td>
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</tbody>
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Figure 1. Civil Disobedience/Direct Action
feelings of the property we are concerned with, but rather the property’s owners.

If we accept that the causing of mental suffering is not part of a nonviolent campaign, where do we draw the line? Are we causing someone mental anguish if we destroy a work of art? Their house? A public fence? A nuclear missile? There is a continuum, with a point on it at which damage to property cannot be seen as doing harm to people — thus it cannot be excluded from a nonviolent campaign.

There are probably as many examples of where nonviolent activists draw the line on property damage as there are individuals. Some people would exclude personal possessions, but would allow the destruction of state-owned or corporate property. Some would exclude all property, regardless of ownership, if it served some socially useful function — and allow destruction of only inherently evil property, such as nuclear weapons. Some people would accept minor destruction of property such as fences erected to

Auckland, September 1981. A police car is destroyed by demonstrators during the third Rugby Test between the South African Springboks and the New Zealand All Blacks.
prevent protest marches or occupations. Clearly there is plenty of room for disagreement in this area.

Most people would agree that the philosophical question, “what is violence to property?”, needs to be decided on a personal level. In many cases the decision is not philosophical but rather tactical.¹⁰ For now we must accept that there is no definition of nonviolence that everyone will agree to where property damage is concerned.

**Negotiation and compromise**

Very often, the nonviolent action will reach a point where negotiations seem appropriate. Choosing to negotiate because the campaign is deadlocked, the activist group needs to regroup, or to provide an honourable way out for the opponent rather than seeking total defeat, should not be seen as compromise. Negotiations may in fact result in compromise on minor points, but since compromise requires at least some willingness by both sides to give in on some issues, compromise on points of principle cannot occur. To quote Gene Sharp:

> “Nonviolent actionists see such compromise at times as morally and politically unacceptable. For example, how does one ‘split the difference’ on such issues as freedom of religion or speech, equal treatment of minorities, international aggression, the existence of a dictatorship, and the like? Compromise on basic issues is thus rejected both as a substitute for nonviolent struggle and as a means of settling a nonviolent campaign. Nonviolent actionists are willing to negotiate, but not on essentials — even when they cannot be won.”¹¹

Negotiation, either from a position of strength or weakness, should therefore be seen as a way of reaching agreement on minor points, and possibly agreeing to differ if points of principle are raised. It should not be rejected automatically by the campaign, but neither should it be seen as the goal of direct action.

**Nonviolence as a philosophy**

There are many levels of adherence to nonviolence as a philosophy. Some people see nonviolence as a political tool — useful but with no connection to their day-to-day private lives.
Some define nonviolence as a personal statement or a way of life, sometimes even precluding political action. Still others will accept bits of the philosophy as they find them useful, discarding what seems irrelevant to their circumstances. All these views have adherents; all are valid for those who hold to them. To conclude this chapter I will give some indication of my approach to nonviolence, and how I will use the term for the rest of this book – without claiming that it is the only, or even the “correct”, definition.

Nonviolence is an integrated philosophy. Politically, it is based on a theory of power that gives every individual the ability, and the right, to act for social and political change. It provides a mechanism for social change through nonviolent direct action. On a personal level, it involves a belief in the worth of all people as individuals, irrespective of their views or beliefs. It incorporates a respect for all life, not only humanity, and it therefore challenges the morality of using animals for food or research. It rejects the right of any individual or group to hold power over another individual or group, therefore it requires a commitment to struggle against all forms of oppression, including racism and sexism. It requires a commitment to anti-militarism, not just anti-nuclearism. It involves a commitment to work in non-hierarchical groups where possible, and to use power-sharing decision making rather than power building processes. Finally, and ultimately, it implies a need to change the basis of power within society, destroying power structures which oppress rather than just seizing control of them.
References


2 “Ahimsa: Noninjury in thought, word, and deed to all forms of life”. Sharp, Gandhi as a Political Strategist, p. 324.


4 See also Carter, Direct Action and Direct Action and Liberal Democracy.

5 Wieck, ”The Habit of Direct Action”, in Reinventing Anarchy, Erlich at al.

6 Ibid. One should not, of course, be going into a butcher’s shop at all!


8 Bedau, Civil Disobedience; Theory and Practice has several articles on this topic.

9 This was the position taken by the Plowshares 8, a group in the United States which broke in to a nuclear weapons facility and destroyed warheads for Trident II missiles.

10 Sharp, The Politics of Nonviolent Action, volume 3, pp. 608-611 lists 9 reasons why sabotage and damaged property may harm a nonviolent campaign.


12 See “Nonviolence: Moral Principle or Political Technique?” In Sharp, Gandhi as a Political Strategist, chapter 13, pp. 273-309, for a discussion of these points.

13 See especially Singer, Animal Liberation, for a discussion of the moral issues involved in the animal rights area.
To understand how nonviolence works, we must have an understanding of the theory of power on which it is based. What is political power? Who in society has that power? The answer to these two questions profoundly affects how we approach the process of social change.

Many people equate political power with politicians and government — especially Cabinet. The party in government has “political power”, the opposition is in the “political wilderness”, and the rest of us don’t even exist.

The theory that political power is inherent in the positions at the top is behind much of the political violence in the world. If power belongs to the position, then the way to achieve power is to remove whoever is in the position and take over. Interestingly this philosophy is the same as that involved in electoral politics — only the method of getting to the top is different.

Political “lobbying” and “pressure group politics” indicate an alternative view of the nature of political power. People from across the political spectrum are realising that it is possible — indeed necessary — to influence politicians’ views other than through the ballot box. While some such groups are “asking for favours” and do not challenge the status quo, many are now saying “listen to us or suffer the consequences”.

The nonviolent activist’s view of political power is an extension of this principle. Power is seen as essentially unstable, dependent
on a number of sources for its existence. Control of these sources is not ultimately in the hands of politicians. If the whole population, or even some segments of it, withdraw support from the government, the sources upon which power is based will be affected — and the politicians “in power” will find themselves rendered powerless.

The view that those “in power” can be controlled by the use of these sources is referred to by Gene Sharp as the “pluralistic” theory of power.¹ This is the opposite to the “monolithic” theory, which claims that power is ultimately based on violence, and that those with the greatest access to violence have the greatest power. The monolithic theory suggests that power exists in a distinct amount, possessed by those in government by right of their position. The pluralistic theory says that power is given to those in government by the population, through the mechanisms outlined below. Government access to those sources of power depends upon the obedience and cooperation of the population (see figure 2).

What are those sources? Gene Sharp, in his book *Power and Struggle*, lists six.²

*Human resources*
A ruler’s power is dependent on the number of people who will cooperate, assist, or provide services to the government. This includes the civil service, police and other security forces, and workers in various key industries. If the people are not the to help the government govern, it is powerless.

*Skills and knowledge*
Access to skills and knowledge is also essential. A government may have all the material resources available, it may have
people willing to do the necessary work, but without the necessary knowledge, nothing can be done. As the technological complexity of society increases, this source of power is becoming increasingly important.

**Material resources**
Control of finances, the economic system, material resources, foreign aid etc, will all affect a government’s power. Cutting off aid, or financial withdrawal from a country, is a well practiced destabilisation technique.

**Authority**
This is the perception of a “right to govern” which is held by the population. They accept that the politician or ruler has authority over them by right, and therefore do not question the government. An “elected government” will have more power than an “illegal regime”. Many will accept unpopular or repressive decisions because they are made by “legitimate rulers”.

**Intangible factors**
These include psychological and cultural factors. The extent to which a population as submissive or obedient will affect the power that a government can hold over it. Some cultures are notoriously rebellious because rebellion is an honourable tradition. Other cultures and religions preach submission to authority.

**Sanctions**
This is the government’s ultimate source of power but it is also the most precarious. Use of sanctions — either the legal system, the police, the army, or ad hoc vigilante actions — is often a way to maintain control of the first five sources of power. While the ability to apply sanctions is a constant source of power for all rulers, its basis may be easily challenged, as we shall see later.

Why are obedience and corporation necessary? If we accept that power is dependent on the sources Sharp lists, then we can see that these sources depended totally upon the population’s cooperation. Let us look at each in turn.

The intangible factors such as attitude to authority, and a tendency towards submission, are possibly the hardest to change. Yet these attitudes are ultimately moulded by the people. Gandhi saw the development of self-awareness as an important step in
overcoming these attitudes, and the most important factor in building an independence movement. Once the population sees the government as illegitimate or undesirable, a considerable step towards removing that government has been taken. Neither of these factors can be forced onto the population. The government may try to influence these attitudes, but ultimately people will form their own.

Human resources, skills and knowledge are only available through the cooperation or obedience of the people involved. If the personnel that the government needs will not cooperate, and cannot be made to obey, then government becomes impossible.

Access to material resources is less dependent on the cooperation of the population, since it deals with inanimate resources rather than human ones. Yet even sacks of flour do not “appear”. They must be manufactured, transported, utilised — handled at all stages by people; people whom must be willing to cooperate or forced to obey.

In all these cases we see that there are two levels of “cooperation”. People may willingly support the government because it is in their interests to do so, or they may cooperate because they are forced to do so against the will. The ability to compel obedience revolves around the use of sanctions.

**Sanctions**
When the willing cooperation of the population is not present, then the final source of power comes into play. Ultimately, all governments depend on sanctions of some form to enforce obedience and cooperation.

What are sanctions? In the simplest sense we can consider them to be any mechanism the government has at its disposal to force obedience when it is not willingly given. Sanctions always carry an element of compulsion, no matter how small. From the $6 parking ticket to the death sentence for treason, the government tries to force obedience through the threat of punishment.

Sanctions may or may not be violent. They may involve imprisonment, exile, monetary penalties, corporal or capital
punishment. They may be intended as a deterrent to prevent actions the government disapproves, or they may be used as punishment after the event. Sanctions may be enforced by the police, the courts, or the army. They may be based on laws, regulations, local bylaws, or arbitrary decisions of any of the arms of government. Ultimately, the state must depend upon either the willing participation of all its subjects, or on obedience enforced by sanctions of some type.

However, even the use of sanctions is not totally under the control of the government. Their enforcement requires the active and willing participation of at least some of the population. People cannot be arrested if the police refuse to arrest them. They cannot be imprisoned if the courts let them go free. They cannot be shot if no-one will fire the gun. There are numerous examples of individuals within government enforcement agencies refusing to apply sanctions. From the Indian police officers who refused to use their lathis on Gandhi’s followers to the jury in New Plymouth who would not bring in a guilty verdict against the Parihaka
fencers until the judge said he would sentence the defendants to “only one hour imprisonment”, governments have discovered that they cannot always rely on their agents to enforce sanctions.

Even if a government has the will and the ability to enforce the sanctions it desires, there is no guarantee of success. Gene Sharp maintains that it is not the sanction itself that causes obedience, but rather fear of the sanction. Punishment after the event is not, in itself, enough to enforce obedience. Fear of the anticipated punishment is essential.

Surely it is academic whether the sanction, or fear of the sanction, causes obedience? Isn’t the end result the same? Not so, and this distinction is central to nonviolence as an active means of social change.

It is possible in any society for the government to outlaw certain nonviolent activities such as strikes. In Aotearoa in 1983, and again in Queensland in 1985, we saw the passing of Bills making it illegal for electricity workers to strike for any reason. What does such a Bill mean? Can it guarantee a continual supply of electricity? The answer is, of course, no.

If the workers strike in defiance of the law, the government has at its disposal strong sanctions — including fines and, ultimately, prison. The sanctions are there, they can be invoked, but they cannot force a person to work. A worker may indeed be threatened with prison, and decide that work is a more desirable option. The threat of the sanction has then had the desired effect. Should the worker decided to continue the strike though, actual imprisonment will not achieve a return to work. A person may be threatened, fined and imprisoned, but ultimately it is that person’s choice whether they submit, or continue the strike.

It is the threat of impending punishment that causes people to obey. If people choose to disregard the threat, to act despite the probable consequences, a large number of sanctions lose their force. Fear of the sanction is the important factor.

What happens when a population loses all fear of the sanctions that the government has at its disposal? If an activist group no
longer fears prison, what effect will this have on the ability of
the police and the courts to control their behavior? There have
been a number of examples of this happening in Aotearoa and
worldwide the use of civil disobedience has become a regular
occurrence. Since the Seabrook occupation in 1977, where over
1400 demonstrators were arrested and some refused bail for two
weeks, filling the jails has become a common tactic for both
the peace movement and those opposing nuclear power in the
United States. Arrest is no longer seen as a social stigma to be
avoided at all costs and consequently the police have lost a major
weapon. In the past, threat of arrest, fear of arrest, were enough
to prevent people taking part in civil disobedience actions such
as occupations and blockades. Now, to be sure, the police may
still arrest people – but that does not stop the blockade. Arrests
and court cases become a victory and a way to continue the
campaign, rather than a defeat. The sanction of arrest has been
co-opted and nullified by the protest movement.

Conclusion
If a social change movement has the public support necessary
to gain control of the human and material resources, and if the
attitudes of the population change sufficiently to overcome the
intangible sources of political power, sanctions are the only
source of power left to the government. Should a significant
proportion of the population hold a clear understanding of the
nature of sanctions, a determination to undertake the risks and
suffering associated with defying those sanctions, and a clear
strategy to achieve change, then the opponent is doomed.
Building a campaign to reach this point is the subject of the next
chapter.

References
1 Sharp, The Politics of Nonviolent Action, volume 1, pp. 8-10.
2 Ibid, pp. 11-12.
3 Scott, Ask That Mountain: The Story of Parihaka, pp. 81-82.
4 A description of the Seabrook occupation, which has provided an inspiration to
many similar actions around the world since 1977, can be found in Crown, Hell No,
We Won’t Glow: Seabrook 1977.
Aramoana, January 1980. A member of the Save Aramoana Campaign flies the Campaign’s flag from a weather testing tower erected on the site by the consortium.
A nonviolent campaign, like any other campaign, is far more likely to succeed if it is carefully planned. Although not strictly related to nonviolent theory, it will be useful to look briefly at the stages a campaign should pass through, so as to see the effects they may have on nonviolent action, and the relationship between general campaign planning and nonviolent dynamics. Throughout this chapter, I will use the example of the Save Aramoana Campaign to illustrate these stages.

The Save Aramoana Campaign was formed in late 1979 to oppose the building of an aluminium smelter at Aramoana, at the entrance to Otago Harbour. From its inception, it was committed to nonviolence and open methods of working. Although the smelter proposal was dropped before the direct action stages were reached, planning by the Campaign was well advanced, and the proposed actions are included here.

We can consider any well-managed campaign to pass through a number of stages. While a nonviolent campaign may differ in the later stages from other styles of political action, the early stages apply equally to any campaign. These stages can be described as follows:

**Investigation**

Before any campaign begins publicly, it is essential that the activists be well prepared. Investigation involves looking at the issues in the campaign, likely opponents and supporters and their current positions on the issue, and gathering of background information.
This information is necessary for self education and public education. It provides the basis for planning the campaign, and identifies potential areas of difficulty. Investigation increases the confidence of those involved in the campaign, and minimises the risks of making inaccurate statements. Time spent in investigation is never wasted.

In the Save Aramoana Campaign, the investigation stage was extensive and ongoing. This was seen especially in the change in emphasis for the Campaign over the two years of its peak. Originally the smelter was opposed on primarily environmental grounds, but our ongoing investigations into the economics of the proposal provided us with a number of very sound economic reasons to oppose the smelter. These reasons enabled us to reach a far wider group of potential supporters than would have been possible on purely environmental grounds.

**Negotiation**
At an early stage of the campaign, it is necessary to establish some form of dialogue with all those affected by the campaign.

Figure 3. Stages of a nonviolent direct action campaign
The aim of negotiations is partly, but only partly, to achieve resolution of the conflict. Although it is possible that negotiations at this point will persuade the opponents to reach agreement, this should not be seen as the only objective. Informing your opponents of your plans, and allowing them to meet you face-to-face, are also important reasons for negotiations.

One advantage in early negotiations is the breaking down of stereotypes. This is a two-way process. You are more able to relate to your opponents if you have met them personally, and likewise they are less able to stereotype you. Brutality towards other people is far more possible if they are classified as “a group” rather than real people. While face-to-face negotiations are no guarantee of respect, it becomes far harder to slander or brutalise people whom you meet in person regularly.

Informing your opponent of your general plans is also useful in helping to dispel fear. If your opponents are unsure of what you are planning, they are likely to assume the worst and act accordingly. You therefore have much to gain by keeping them informed. There are also decided psychological advantages to this course of action. The opponents are in all probability used to secrecy, and it can be unsettling to them to be faced with an opponent who operates openly, with nothing to fear.

The Save Aramoana Campaign had negotiations with both our opponent, South Pacific Aluminium, and the police. Members of the campaign met with partners in South Pacific Aluminium in Auckland, Sydney and Geneva during 1980, and explained our opposition to the proposal, and our commitment to the use of nonviolent direct action to stop it should the need arise.

The police were contacted at an early point in the campaign. Ongoing liaison between the campaign and the police covered such points as our commitment to nonviolence, our willingness to use large-scale civil disobedience if necessary, and our determination to maintain good relations with the police even in conflict situations.
Aramoana, January 1980. A Campaign member awaits the arrival of police after flying the Save Aramoana Campaign’s flag from the consortium’s pylon.
Education
The third step in any campaign must involve education; both of your own supporters, who must be supplied with information to better enable them to participate in the campaign, and of the general public. A campaign that neglects to educate its members and keep them all informed of developments, runs the danger of losing active support. It can become isolated from its membership, and the number involved becomes steadily smaller.

Neglecting to educate the public is also dangerous. You cannot assume that the public know the issues involved, or are even aware of the existence of the problem you are fighting. Even if awareness is present, it is dangerous to leave education to the media, who often give a distorted view of events based on news value, rather than a desire to inform. For any campaign to have long-term success, it is essential to have the support of a reasonable proportion of the public — and that support is only going to be gained through education.

Another aspect of education is to inform the public of upcoming actions, and why they are necessary. It is far easier to prepare the way for actions, especially actions which may break the law, than it is to try and explain your reasons in the heat of the argument which inevitably arises after mass civil disobedience or other controversial actions.

Within the Campaign, a great emphasis was placed on education work, both locally and nationally. The Campaign published a number of booklets and leaflets outlining the issues, which were sold or given away on street corners. In addition, individuals from the Campaign undertook a massive speaking campaign, and most organisations in Dunedin were approached and spoken to, irrespective of the views on the issue.

Education of Campaign members included planning days and workshops, as well as the production of more detailed information kits covering the issues in depth. These were especially important given the large number of members undertaking speaking engagements.
Preparation for direct action
In a nonviolent campaign, generally direct action will be used at some point. Such action may be small, or it may be a massive occupation involving thousands of people. Whatever the scale, it is essential that any action be well planned.

Preparation for direct action involves education of the public. They must understand in advance why such actions are seen as necessary, and what will be involved. Preparation must involve logistical factors — making sure that all the necessary planning for...
the action is done well in advance. For example, if the action is a blockade in a forest, details of transport, communication, food, shelter etc all need to be carefully planned. The most important factor in any action is the people involved, and preparation of those participating is extremely important. People must be aware of the risks they may face – and the consequences of arrest or injury. They must be prepared and trained in the use of nonviolent action if necessary, so that nonviolence does not break down during the action. A well-prepared group will have unity and commitment which may mean the success of an action, rather than a collapse due to unforeseen stresses.

Preparation for direct action can in itself be direct action. Public planning for mass civil disobedience can put pressure on opponents. It can be used as part of the gradual buildup of pressure, and allow the opponent a way out before large-scale direct action intensifies the conflict. For example, during the Save Aramoana Campaign in Dunedin during 1980, photographs of people training to blockade the road to the site were sent to the consortium, along with letters explaining the type of tactics which were being planned.

Planning for both roadblocks and site occupations were well underway by the time the first consortium partner withdrew in 1981. The logistical planning for a successful action to prevent the widening of the road to the site was completed, as was the preliminary training of some participants. The need for such actions were starting to be raised in the media, although in retrospect more work would have been necessary in this area.

Direct action
Direct action has many goals in a nonviolent campaign. It can be used to highlight a particular injustice. It may be intended as an “exploratory” action, to test the strength and will of the opposition. It may be used to publicise the campaign, thereby drawing in more members, more money etc. Or it may be used to initiate actions and campaigns by other supporting groups elsewhere.

Whatever the goals of direct action, it must be seen as part of the overall struggle. Direct action cannot be an end in itself, or come
to dominate the campaign. It must not draw support away from the other aspects of the campaign to the campaign’s detriment. The direct action part of the campaign is a pivotal point in a nonviolent campaign, and an understanding of the dynamics of the nonviolent campaign is extremely important for this stage to be successful. The dynamics of this stage are covered in detail in chapter 4.

The Save Aramoana Campaign undertook one civil disobedience direct action. A member of the Campaign climbed the weather tower erected on the site, and flew the Campaign’s flag from it. Other planned actions involved the prevention of work on the road to the site, opposition to evictions of those living in the area, and a site occupation to prevent work starting.

**Protracted struggle**
The time after a direct action can be an anti-climax, since the buildup to the action can be long and intense. The campaign can easily lose impetus at this point. It is essential that the next phase, the protracted struggle, is planned for in advance. The goals of the long-term campaign must remain clear, and the ongoing campaign should work towards those goals by ensuring that all the preceding stages continue. The protracted struggle can also involve development of alternative institutions to replace those opposed. Continuing the campaign after temporary setbacks, or knowing how to continue after a major success, can be difficult, and needs to be planned for.

Although most of the direct actions planned by the Campaign were rendered unnecessary by the withdrawal of the main overseas partner in South Pacific Aluminium late in 1981, the struggle is still continuing. New partners were found on a couple of occasions, and the aim of the Campaign, to gain reserves status for the land, has still not been realised.4

These six stages should not be seen as separate entities to be worked through one by one. The campaign is an ongoing development, and once a stage is begun it needs to be continued throughout the campaign. Each stage may vary in relative importance from time to time, as the priorities of the campaign change, but no part can be allowed to drop completely. Finally,
although each stage, once begun, should continue alongside the others, it is important to start each stage in order. To enter negotiations before sufficient investigation has been done could be fatal to the campaign; to begin preparation for direct action before the public are aware of the need for action and the aims of the campaign could lead to disaster. A word of warning, though. Some campaigns carry this to the extreme — remember that the goal of a nonviolent campaign is to achieve meaningful change, not to spend five years investigating and never move on to effecting change.

References


2 Negotiations here should not be confused with compromise. See chapter 1, Negotiation and compromise.

3 For example, the sit-ins to desegregate lunch counters which were part of the US civil rights movement were highlighting the wider issues of segregation by focusing on a particularly clear example. See Meier and Rudwick, CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, pp. 101-131.

4 New footnote (2011 edition). Eventually the Campaign’s aim of achieving reserve status for the salt marsh at Aramoana was realised.
Dunedin, September 1981. A member of the anti-apartheid movement, arrested for blocking a city intersection, is processed by the police.
Chapter 4

The Dynamics of Nonviolent Direct Action

At certain points in a campaign, each of the participant groups will experience changes in their power relative to their opponent. This interplay of forces within the campaign, the constantly changing power relationships, is known as the dynamics.

An understanding of the dynamics of nonviolent direct action is central to the effective use of nonviolence. Without an understanding of the dynamics of the struggle, wrong actions may be taken, wrong decisions made, and the campaign may even be called off on the point of success. What are nonviolent dynamics, and how do they affect a campaign?

It is important not only to take the right actions, but to take them at the right time. As any military commander knows, the best tactics may be useless unless fitted into a coherent strategy. While numerous nonviolent campaigns have succeeded with no planning, no strategy, and spontaneous tactics, the chances of success are greatly enhanced if the dynamics of nonviolent direct action are taken into account in the planning of a campaign.

There are two reasons for this. First, the whole buildup of actions can be planned to take into account the unique aspects of a nonviolent campaign. Second, and more important, is the relationship between an understanding of dynamics and the feeling of success or failure. Nonviolent campaigns, more than any other, illustrate the principle that “it is always darkest before the dawn”. Indeed, it is legitimate to suggest that when you reach a point where repression is harshest, where the campaign
seems about to collapse, and when all within the campaign are close to despair, then at that point you are closest to success.¹

To understand the dynamics and how they affect a nonviolent campaign we need to look back at the stages a campaign should pass through. But first, we need to digress and look briefly at the mechanisms by which we can achieve change in a campaign.

**Mechanisms of change**
Conversion, accommodation and coercion are the three mechanisms of change in a nonviolent campaign.² They differ as follows;

**Conversion**
An opponent is changed through conversion if they actually come to support the aims of the nonviolent group. Gandhi suggested this as being the most meaningful form of change.

**Accommodation**
If the opponent is not converted, yet reluctantly agrees to go along with the change sought, it is referred to as accommodation.

![The Pendulum Chart](image-url)

Figure 4
The Pendulum Chart
This is the most common form of change in “democratic” countries, where the government has to accommodate pressure groups within the electorate. The pressure group must, however, beware of apparent accommodation which turns out to be no more than mere cosmetic change.

**Nonviolent coercion**

Should the opponent be totally opposed to change and not prepared to accept change, the only mechanism available to the nonviolent group is coercion. This comes about when the opponent wishes to suppress the nonviolent group, yet cannot because the sources of power are withdrawn. One example of nonviolent coercion took place in Russia in 1917, when the Tsar ordered his troops to disperse the revolution, but they would not obey. He was rendered powerless when the army mutinied, and his regime collapsed.³
These three mechanisms all bring about nonviolent change, and come into play at different parts of the campaign.

**Dynamics in a nonviolent campaign**

As described in chapter 3, a nonviolent campaign goes through a number of stages. The first four of these (investigation, negotiation, education, preparation for action) may be part of any well-planned political campaign, and may lead to success through conversion. However, the use of direct action in a nonviolent campaign marks a very significant point. Different dynamics become important, and may lead to results not expected in a conventional campaign. Because the use of direct action will almost inevitably result in some loss of public support, a temptation to abandon nonviolence occurs. If gains in public support were seen as very important, there is a temptation to fall back into a lobbying style of campaign to regain support. This is the factor that most commonly stops campaigns using direct action, and a conscious decision needs to be made to balance temporary loss of support against the potential progress to be made through the use of nonviolent direct action.

More important to the campaign than the loss of public support, however, is the fact that the campaign’s use of direct action presents a challenge to the authorities which cannot be ignored. The opponent is faced with a dilemma and must react or concede defeat.

From our understanding of the nature of power, and especially the politician’s view of power, it should be apparent that most governments placed in this position are unlikely to concede — after all, the view of power gives them every confidence that they will prevail. They are likely, therefore, to use some of the numerous sanctions that they have available to them. Their view of society often encourages them to believe that they can control any political or activist group through the judicial system, the police and armed forces, or their control of the media. Having this belief in their own power, and the resources at their disposal, it is almost inevitable that they will use them.

How should the activist group react? This is the second pivotal point in the campaign, and it is the point at which make many
nonviolent campaigns go wrong. There are four options open to the campaign in the face of sanctions: resorting to violence; backing down; a strategic withdrawal; or remaining firm. Let us look at these options.

Option 1: Resort to violence
Violence may take the form of street violence such as riots and looting, acts of terrorism, or guerilla war. It may also include the “pseudo violence” of the 1981 Springbok tour demonstrations. What is likely to happen if we allow the campaign to turn to violence?

First, there is likely to be a general loss of support for the activist group. Many people will say that they support the aims of the group, but law and order must be preserved. This is similar to the reaction when direct action was first used, but it is likely to be much stronger, and involve far more people. A large number

![Figure 6](image-url)  
Figure 6: The four choices when facing sanctions

Opponent’s Dilemma (Two Choices)

- Use Sanctions
- Reach Agreement (Accommodation)

Activist Group’s four choices

- Use Violence (figure 7)
- Back Down (figure 8)
- Remain Firm (figure 9)
- Strategic Withdrawal (figure 10)
of people feel that violence, whatever the cause, is not acceptable.

Second, as a result of this loss of support for the activist group, the authorities are far more able and far more likely to use strong repressive measures against the group. They realise that public opinion will probably support them. While there may have been public opposition to the use of teargas on a nonviolent crowd, there is less likely to be opposition if that crowd is rioting. Resorting to violence will increase repression.

Third, individuals within the opponent’s forces are more likely to overreact. No matter how much an individual officer may disagree with the campaign, the lack of physical threat in a nonviolent demonstration eliminates one source of tension within the situation. In a violent situation, fear for their own safety make cause police to use far stronger repression than they might otherwise have considered, even though individuals within the police may agree with the aims of the campaign.

Fourth, the use of violence polarises the two groups, making negotiation and compromise more difficult. If the campaign is losing, it is likely to be severely repressed by the opponent as a warning to other groups. If the opponent is losing, they are likely to react even more strongly. They have no way out that will not be seen as “giving in to violence and disorder”.

Finally, resorting to violence reinforces the opponent’s view that violence is the best, or even the only, way to wage conflict. This makes violence more likely in future campaigns.
Auckland, September 1981. Supposedly “nonviolent” demonstrators preparing to meet the police.
These factors make the resolution of the situation involving escalating violence very difficult. However it is possible for violence to work. If the activist group has a greater access to the forces involved in a violent struggle, and sufficient determination to fight what may ultimately amount to a Civil War, then a violent campaign may succeed. However in the majority of situations the government holds a near monopoly on the use of violence. Unless the activist group has outside help, or can gain the support of a significant number within the security forces, the use of violence will lead to widespread bloodshed and failure.

**Option 2: Back down**
The activist group organising the campaign may decide it is not prepared to face the sanctions used by the opponent. If this happens, and the campaign is publicly seen to be defeated by the sanctions, it has backed down. Apart from the very important consequence that this option has, namely defeat (or at the very least a temporary setback in the campaign), there are other more subtle effects we must consider.

First, public opinion is likely to move against the activist group. Support for the authorities will grow, since they are seen as having successfully dealt with a challenge to “law and order”. If it is contemplated that the campaign will be renewed at some later time, this loss of support is important. It would be far better to wait until conditions are more favourable before starting the direct action phase of the campaign, than launching it unprepared (thus risking defeat) and having to start again. Fighting an issue a second time after a defeat puts the group at a considerable disadvantage.

Even more important is the long-term effect that the activists’ backing down may have on the opponent. Seeing that the sanctions used against the group achieved the desired result, the opponent is far more likely to use the same sanctions in the future. If they do not
work the second time, it is possible that your opponent will feel that the severity of the sanctions was the problem — and use stronger ones.

A particularly clear example occurred in Wellington during the 1981 Springbok Tour. Following a march in Molesworth Street where police used considerable violence on a predominantly peaceful crowd, marshals announced that the demonstration the following Saturday would not attempt to cross police lines and stop the match. This was reinforced by the statement that:

“We have had to consider the cost we are prepared to pay for our protest. We have had to ask whether we would accept the situation where our people were seriously injured if not killed. We have therefore decided that in Palmerston North on Saturday the march will not attempt to storm the game and force its cancellation. Nor will it attempt to break through police lines”

— Lindsay Wright, spokesperson for COST.5

Clearly the message to the police — and one which later events showed that they understood — was that violence through the use of batons was an effective way of maintaining control of the demonstrations. The demonstrators themselves had stated that they would behave “responsibly” under the threat of batons. This statement by Lindsay Wright reinforced the use of batons, rather than restricted it.

The choice and risks of backing down in the face of sanctions or repression can be illustrated on an individual level as well as in the context of a campaign. One common tactic in nonviolent intervention is the “sitting in front of bulldozers” syndrome. Most people contemplating such action in the course of a nonviolent blockade would accept that violence against the bulldozer or driver would not be appropriate (although this can never be stressed too often) but it is fairly common to find people who do not anticipate being injured because they intend moving before the bulldozer reaches them.

In this situation, as in the example already quoted, backing down reinforces the idea that sanctions are effective. It is extremely unlikely that a bulldozer driver will deliberately run over a
demonstrator in cold blood, no matter how strong his/her feelings on the issue. However, if the driver gets the idea that edging up to the people on the ground will persuade them to move, the stage is set for someone to get run over by accident. After all, “just a little nudge got some to move, so a slightly harder one may move the rest...”. The effect of some people backing down under the pressure is to reinforce the sanction and increase the chance that it will continue to be used with greater force. 

Option 3: Remain firm
If we cannot resort to violence, and we cannot back down, what should we do in the face of sanctions? The nonviolent response to sanctions of any form is simple: remain nonviolent – do not retaliate with violence; remain firm – do not back down. As far as possible, the activist group should continue according to plan – and if possible, intensify the pressure which has resulted in the sanctions. The aim should be to show that the sanctions are ineffective in stopping the campaign. This is far easier if those involved in the campaign have an understanding of the dynamics of the struggle. With that understanding the campaign can anticipate repression and sanctions, and be prepared for them. The use of sanctions indicates that the dynamics are proceeding as expected, that the campaign has not lost control, and that public opinion will start to swing in its favour.

Once again an example may help. A common nonviolent response to arrest or police harassment is filling the jails. Arrest of picketers should lead not to the calling off of the action, but rather to increasing numbers of people taking the place of those arrested. If the campaign has the numbers and

Figure 9 Remaining firm
commitment to carry this sort of action through, it can be very effective.

What are the effects of remaining firm and intensifying the nonviolent struggle? One of the first to be noticed is an increase in public support with a corresponding decrease in support for the opponent. People are used to seeing groups respond to violence with violence, and disciplined nonviolence can have a remarkable effect on the population. This shows up in two groups — the “public”, who may be interested in the campaign but are at this stage not involved, and the “agents of the opposition”, including police, army, local body officials etc. Each group reacts differently. Increased public support can lead to increased numbers of people joining the campaign or becoming more active in it. There are also likely to be dramatic effects on the “agents”, who may become less vigorous in their enforcement of sanctions, or in extreme cases refuse completely to enforce them. There are several examples of this happening in anti-Vietnam war demonstrations in the United States, and during Gandhi’s campaigns in India and South Africa.7

A second effect is an increase in morale within the campaign. Because the sanctions were expected, the use is seen as part of the campaign. The group feels “in control” of the situation despite the sanctions it is facing, and consequently morale will be high. This enables greater resistance to the sanctions than may first be expected.

The third important effect is on the opponent. There will be a growing awareness that the sanctions being used are not effective. Instead of leading to the cessation of direct action as was intended, they are intensifying the campaign. Before looking at the effect of this realisation, it will be valuable to consider the fourth option for the campaign: a strategic withdrawal.

**Option 4: Strategic withdrawal**
Accepting that nonviolent campaigns can sometimes fail, can failure be dealt with so that the adverse effects associated with backing down are not brought into play? Honourable withdrawal from a campaign when the struggle is going badly is preferable to carrying on and suffering a major defeat. Withdrawal on
the campaign’s terms leaves the option open for taking up the struggle against when conditions are more suitable. As Gandhi said:

“a wise general does not wait till he is actually routed; he withdraws in time in an orderly manner from a position which he knows he would not be able to hold.”

Looking ahead with a full understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of both sides may lead to the campaign negotiating a compromise settlement before it collapses. Alternatively, if matters of principle are involved, compromise may not be an option. In this case a re-evaluation of strategy, with a temporary halt in the campaign, may help. This allows the group to increase its internal strength and organisation. The choice of timing for a re-evaluation of this type is important, as the campaign must not be seen by either its members or the opponent to have failed.

If negotiations are used as a breathing space, the lessons of the earlier part of the campaign must be considered, and if necessary the campaign should start up again at a lower level of intensity, and not be lured into repeating the mistakes which led to its losing ground. If the time taken to regroup is used wisely, to increase understanding in both the activist group and the population, to increase numbers, and to re-evaluate strategy, the campaign may gain the initiative once again.

When looking at a setback, it is wise to look at the “stages of the campaign” mentioned earlier. Has the group launched into direct action prematurely? Has the campaign escalated too fast for the group to remain in control? Has the direct action taken energy from the investigation, education, and negotiation phases (which must continue throughout)? Using a lull or break in the campaign to concentrate on these less visible, but vital, steps may bring the campaign back to life. It is too easy to rush

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**Figure 10 Withdrawal**

- **Activist Group Withdraws**
- **Some loss of public support**
- **Return to previous stage of Campaign**
ahead and escalate the campaign to the point that it collapses and fails. Whenever the activist group is faced with sanctions, and the four-way choice is made, the intensity of the struggle increases. With a strong and determined nonviolent group, and a stubborn opponent, the action in the campaign could reach very high levels of intensity. There needs to be a way out of the confrontation for both sides.

Protracted struggle
Returning to the situation where the campaign remains firm in the face of sanctions, what options are open to the opponent? There are two; admit defeat and reach some form of accommodation with the campaign, or continue the struggle by applying stronger sanctions. If the opponent admits defeat, and is prepared to negotiate some form of accommodation, the campaign has reached a successful conclusion. Should the opponent decide to continue the struggle, however, one of two things will happen.

If conditions are favourable to the nonviolent group, the opponent may not be able to apply the sanctions effectively. For example, the courts may refuse to apply harsher penalties, or police officers may not actively attempt arrests. Should this stage be reached, the opponent is in serious difficulty. The activist group is in a very strong position and can look for ways to resolve the campaign. The point has been reached where the opponent can no longer continue the struggle despite wishing to do so, and nonviolent coercion has occurred. Depending on the aims and intensity of the campaign, and the state of the opponent, an appropriate face-saving resolution to the conflict may be negotiated.

If harsher sanctions are able to be applied, the nonviolent group is once again placed in the position of having the four choices — violence, backing down, withdrawing, or remaining firm — and the cycle begins again at a slightly higher level of intensity. Given that the activist group remains strictly nonviolent, and continues to apply pressure rather than backing down, it is possible for the campaign to continue around this cycle for some time, with increasing severity of sanctions. However, with each increase in the sanctions that does not lead to defeat of the campaign, there is a loss of support for the opponent. Public opinion will come
more and more to support the campaign, and more members of the opponent’s own group will begin to question their role.

Finally the opponent will either recognise this loss of support and reach some level of accommodation, or will be unable to continue applying sanctions. As mentioned above, at that point victory in some form has been achieved — either through accommodation of the activist group’s demands, or nonviolent coercion leading to the defeat of the opponent. This cycle of increasing repression leading to the opponent’s defeat was seen in the Kapp coup d’état, in Germany during 1920. When newspapers in Germany refused to print Kapp’s Manifesto following the coup, he ordered the army to occupy the offices of the two leading newspapers.
The result was not the submission of the printers, but a strike of all printers in Berlin. Kapp ordered the strikers shot, only to find that none of his troops would carry out the order.⁹

**Victory or defeat**

Will a nonviolent direct action campaign guarantee success if the “rules” are adhered to? If defeat is possible, then what are the consequences of that defeat? These questions must be asked if one is considering the use of nonviolent direct action in a campaign.

I believe that in most situations nonviolent direct action offers a far greater chance of success than any other method of social change. No method, however, can guarantee success. If the political conditions are right, the activists determined, and strategy carefully worked out, success should follow. However, the opponent may have too great a hold on the population. The activist group may decide that the costs involved in winning the campaign are too high. Outside pressures which were not taken into account may not allow the opponent to withdraw. Defeat is always possible.

Defeat does not mean that nonviolence does not work. Defeats occur in violent campaigns all the time, and are accepted. In any struggle, violent or nonviolent, there is potentially a winner and a loser, yet failure of violence to achieve a goal is not seen as a failure of the method — rather it is accepted that some factor was not planned for. The reasons for the defeat are analysed and, where possible, the struggle is continued.

With the relative novelty of nonviolent direct action as a recognised political tool, there is a likelihood that defeat will turn people against nonviolence as a method. Care should be taken, therefore, to evaluate unsuccessful campaigns and try to work out why they failed, as well as evaluating and passing on the lessons learned from successful campaigns.¹⁰

Defeat may not be total, just as victory may not be total, and in a nonviolent campaign there is less likelihood that defeat will be as devastating in its effects on the population as may be the case in a violent campaign. Indeed, campaigns which in the short
Figure 12. The Total View — Dynamics of a Nonviolent Direct Action Campaign

Recognition of the Problem

5 Stages of a Campaign

Opponent’s Dilemma

Sanctions

Activist Group’s Four Choices

Withdrawal

Violence

Back Down

Remain Firm

Return to previous stages of the campaign

Increasing violence

Opponent Wins

Opponent’s Two Choices

Realise Loss of Support

Increased sanctions

Sanctions cannot be applied

Conversion

Accommodation

Increasing loss of support by Opponent

Activist Group Wins

Opponent Wins

Accommodation

Nonviolent Coercion
term may appear to have failed may prove later to have had a pivotal effect in the movement. One very necessary part of any nonviolent campaign is the casting off of fear, and taking up of one’s own power. People who have been through this experience are never able to be completely submissive again.

References

1 “... There are good grounds for believing that the brutalities will be a temporary phase though not necessarily a brief one. Seifert points out that while it is not always the case, ‘... it is entirely possible for the worst persecution to come shortly before capitulation by the opponents’.” Sharp, The Politics of Nonviolent Action, volume 3, page 565.

2 These mechanisms are described in full in The Politics of Nonviolent Action, volume 3, chapter 13, pp. 705-754.


4 This point is covered more fully in the 2nd section of Understanding Nonviolence by Allan Cumming, entitled “Images of violence”. See the end of this book for a copy of that manuscript.

5 Lindsay Wright, spokesperson for COST (Citizens Opposed to the Springbok Tour), speaking at a rally in Parliament grounds. Quoted on Television New Zealand News, July 1981.

6 An expansion of the implications of this example, and the risks “backing down” creates for others in a campaign, can be found in Cumming, Understanding Nonviolence, p. 4.

7 ‘The Police Sergeant was “so sweaty from his exertions that his Sam Browne had sustained his white tunic. I watched him with my heart in my mouth. He drew back his arm for a final swing — and then he dropped his hands down by his side. ‘It’s no use,’ he said, turning to me with a half apologetic grin, ‘you can’t hit a bugger when he stands up to you like that!’ He gave the Sikh a mock salute and walked off”.’ American journalist Negley Farson reporting the Satyagraha at Dharsana Salt Works, May 1930. From Bondurant, The Conquest of Violence, p. 96.


9 There are several references to the Kapp incident in Sharp, The Politics of Nonviolent Action, especially volume 1, pp. 40-41 and volume 3, p. 686.

10 A publication by CND/Peace News, “Preparing for NVDA”, is excellent in its evaluations of past British direct actions, especially in its drawing out of the lessons learned.
Dunedin, August 1983. Three members of Peace Action Dunedin “breaching the peace” in the Golden Centre Mall.
This book has dealt primarily with the theory of nonviolent dynamics, and the importance of this theory in the direct action campaign. The aim of the book has been to present these points in a simple form is possible, in an attempt to reach a broader audience. Consequently, the arguments here have been necessarily brief.

For this reason I would like to conclude with a simple example of a nonviolent direct action, and then indicate further areas of investigation and research for those who wish to develop the ideas discussed here.

**The Golden Centre action — a case study**

During 1983, Peace Action Dunedin, a local peace group, was involved in a series of anti-militarist campaigns. One of these included actions at military recruiting stalls around Dunedin, primarily involving picketing and leafleting those attending the displays. In August, during the school holiday period, a display was set up by the Army in a local shopping mall, “The Golden Centre”. Peace Action Dunedin decided to leaflet it.

Once the display was established several members of the group went down and leafleted around the Mall. Management asked the leafleters to leave, and when they refused the police were called. Unfortunately, by the time the police had arrived, the picketers had all returned to work.
It was apparent that the management of the Mall was not prepared to allow Peace Action Dunedin to promote a view opposed to the militarism on display. Peace Action Dunedin on the other hand, felt that as a matter of principle the display could not be allowed to continue unchallenged through the two weeks of the holiday. It was felt that displays of guns, booby-traps and military paraphernalia were inappropriate as a holiday attraction, since they glorified war and militarism in the eyes of children.

Accordingly the group contacted the police to inform them that the picket would continue on the next day (Thursday). It was pointed out that members of Peace Action Dunedin were intending to break the trespass laws if necessary, but were not intending to be in conflict with the police, should they have to intervene. The Golden Centre management were being presented with a dilemma that they could not ignore.

The next day, with extreme reluctance, the police arrested the four people present (three silent picketers and a photographer who had not participated in the action). They were arrested for breaching the peace — for standing silently in front of the display holding signs which said “Peace Through Nonviolence”. They were released after an hour, without being charged.

At this point Peace Action Dunedin was faced with the four-way choice described in the previous chapter. It could use violence (this was not considered as an option); it could back down (and call off the action, which would have reinforced the view of the police and Mall management that arrests would be effective in the future); it could withdraw strategically (possibly picketing on the street outside the Golden Centre, or arranging to have a display the week following the Army one — two suggestions made by the police); or it could decide to continue the action — the choice which was made.

The police were informed that the action would continue on Friday, but with larger numbers than previously. People would replace those arrested, and those arrested might return on release. The action would also continue into the following week.
The police and Golden Centre management had the option of continuing the arrests, or allowing the picket to proceed. On Friday morning a phone call was received by Peace Action Dunedin, and the police announced that the Golden Centre had agreed to a compromise. The picket would be allowed to continue within the Golden Centre as long as it did not directly prevent people from attending the display. This was acceptable to Peace Action Dunedin as it had never been the intention to block access. During Friday, the action continued on those terms without conflict. Public response was extremely favourable. During the weekend, the Army withdrew its display — a week earlier than planned.

This was a small action. It was low key, and not particularly “radical”. Yet it gained a major concession and forced the removal of a display by the Army. By careful application of the principles of nonviolence in a determined yet peaceful way, the initial aims of the group, plus further gains in actually stopping the display, were realised.

Further reading
Looking back at what I’ve written I am aware of whole areas I have not covered. It is not possible to provide a simple yet comprehensive overview of nonviolent action in a book this size. I have resisted the temptation to expand things, though, and instead I intend to refer readers to other books should they wish to continue their reading.

Nonviolent theory
The best researched work on the theory of nonviolence is undoubtedly that of Gene Sharp, who has done more than any other author to develop a theory of nonviolence in an orderly fashion. The topics covered here, and much expansion of them, are covered in 3 volumes;


  *Part 1: Power and Struggle;*
  *Part 2: The Methods of Nonviolent Action;*
  *Part 3: The Dynamics of Nonviolent Action.*
I would strongly recommend these volumes to anyone who found my treatment too superficial, or whose interest has been stimulated. In addition I recommend:

*Gandhi as a Political Strategist*, and *Social Power and Political Freedom*, both also by Gene Sharp.

*Non-violence in Peace and War, volumes 1 and 2*, by Mohandas K Gandhi.

*The Power of Nonviolence*, by Gregg (which contains excellent case studies).

**Tactics and methods**
For those interested in applying the principles explained here in their campaign, I would recommend:

*People Organising for Power*, by Rachel Bloomfield (which uses local examples);


*Manual for Action*, by Martin Jelfs;


*Preparing for Nonviolent Direct Action*, a joint CND/Peace News publication

**Case studies**
There are a number of other books that deal with specific campaigns. I would suggest the following:

*The Franklin Blockade*, by the Tasmanian Wilderness Society;

*Ask That Mountain*, by Dick Scott (the story of Parihaka);

*Stride Towards Freedom*, Martin Luther King Jr.’s story of the Montgomery bus boycott;

*Mau, Samoa’s Struggle against New Zealand Oppression*, by Michael Field;

*No Bunkers Here; the story of a successful nonviolent action in Wales* by Tony Simpson.
Civilian-based defence
Another more specialised area receiving a lot of interest recently is that of applying the principles of nonviolent action to defence. For those readers involved in the peace movement I would recommend the following:

*Common Sense and Defence*, and *Defence in the Nuclear Age* by Sir Stephen King-Hall;

*War Without Weapons* by Boserup and Mack;

*Making the Abolition of War a Realistic Goal* and *Social Power and Political Freedom*, by Gene Sharp.

Full details of these books and others are included in the bibliography.

**References**

1 Peace Action Dunedin had consistently been refused a stall in the Golden Centre in the past. This concession alone showed the action to have had some effect.
Appendix 1

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UNDERSTANDING NONVIOLENCE

Allan Cumming

2 scenes in Onslow Rd/Marlborough St area, Auckland, September 12th, 1981
Article and photographs by Allan Cumming, with assistance from Sonja Antonsen and Gabrielle Panckhurst.


This article is based on a talk illustrated with slides, first presented to the Tasmanian Wilderness Society in November 1982.

**Acknowledgements**
Many of the ideas in this booklet are developed from the following books by Gene Sharpe:


"There is no greater fallacy than the belief that aims and purposes are one thing while methods and tactics are another."

Emma Goldman

The Dynamics of Nonviolence

Nonviolence is a term often heard now when people describe their political campaigns. The phrase “oh, and of course we are committed to nonviolence” has become a standard line in interviews with activist groups. But what do these groups mean? Do they have an understanding of nonviolence as a political tool? More often than not, they don’t. Nonviolence is a complex form of struggle, involving subtle dynamics which can drastically affect the outcome of campaigns, and to use nonviolence effectively, a group must have a clear understanding of these dynamics.

An understanding of the dynamics is much more than an understanding of the techniques of nonviolence which are now widely used and understood. As with any form of social change activity, it is important to know not only what methods are used, but also why they should be used, how they can achieve success, and when they should be used to best effect. The right action at the wrong time, or for the wrong reasons, is as disastrous in a nonviolent struggle as it is in any campaign.

One of the significant features of a nonviolent campaign is that in order to identify whether or not we (the action group) are succeeding, we need a clear understanding of how nonviolence works. A failure to recognise the underlying dynamics of nonviolent direct action can lead to despair, to surrender, or to
an abandonment of nonviolence and resort to violence because of the apparent failure of the campaign, when in fact the campaign is on the brink of success.

There are three such danger points, and they are related, not surprisingly, to three most common misconceptions about nonviolence.

1. Loss of support.
Many people assume that the simple choice of nonviolence as a method struggle will ensure political support. While it is true that there is less likely to be as much opposition to a nonviolent campaign as to a violent campaign, any direct challenge to recognised authority will bring some adverse response.
The stepping up a campaign from lobbying in education to direct action will result in polarisation of the population and therefore some loss of support. This loss of support is inevitable and more important, it is temporary. An understanding of nonviolence means that we can anticipate this and should not see it as a failure. We can work to minimize it through advanced publicity which explains the issues and the necessity for direct action.

2. Failure to physically stop the opponent.
In campaigns involving direct intervention such as blockades of dam sites or occupation of areas such as forests or rugby fields, it is common to come across the attitude that we are going to physically stop all work through our nonviolent presence. If, as often happens, we are all arrested or removed and work proceeds while we are in jail, people with that attitude may see the action as a failure. This is not necessarily true. Nonviolent intervention is a way of dramatising the issue. We may delay work or make it more expensive, or we may make it politically unacceptable to continue because of the hundreds or thousands of normal law-abiding citizens in jail. But ultimately we are using the intervention to bring the issue into the eyes of those involved, the media and the public, in a way they cannot ignore. Blockades and occupations are a dramatic way of getting people into jail.

Figure 2: The Square, Christchurch, August 15th, 1981
with lots of good media coverage, and any delay in work should be seen as a bonus, not as the primary purpose of the action.

3. **Physical harm to the nonviolent group.**
The most common misconception about nonviolence is the belief that if we are nonviolent the opposition will be as well. This is not true. By choosing a nonviolent form of struggle, we are defining our parameters of action, not the opponent’s. Our decision to be nonviolent does not define anything for the opponent. Indeed it is probable that the opponent will react violently, as governments are founded on and familiar with the use of violence in all its varied forms. Our being nonviolent does not mean we will not be hurt. It means that we will not behave violently. In practice, experience has shown that far fewer people get hurt in a nonviolent campaign than in a violent one because the opponent finds it far less politically acceptable to use violence against the nonviolent opponent, but once again this should be seen as a bonus for using nonviolence not the reason for using it.

The belief that we will not be hurt and that nonviolence has in some way failed if we are, affects our response to repression. We have three options open to us when the opponent uses repression; we can back down, we can resort to violence, or we can remain firm. In many ways this is the critical time in a campaign,

![Figure 3: Fowldes Park, Auckland, September 12th, 1981](image)
and if we do not understand the dynamics of nonviolence, it is easy to make the wrong choice. If we back down, we reinforce the opponent’s belief in repression as an effective means of social control, thus increasing the likelihood of it being used in the future. In effect, we are saying “if you do not want us to protest all you need to do is this (be it batons, arrest or slander) and we will stop”. Backing down under repression leaves the action group in a far worse position than originally existed.

If we resort to violence, lashing out determined to hurt others because we have been hurt, we reinforce the opponent’s belief that violence is the way. It allows the greater use of force by the opponent, who is now defending “law and order” against “mob rule”. It loses support for us because our stated commitment to nonviolence is exposed as being invalid.

The third option is for us to remain firm and show that repression is ineffective and therefore a waste of time and money. Time and time again this has proved to be the most effective way to halt repression - by showing that does not work.

If we understand that repression is to be expected, and after all we cannot expect to challenge the authority of society without provoking some reaction, we are able to see clearly the need to remain nonviolent. If we understand the dynamics of nonviolent action we will anticipate repression in some form, and be ready for it. Repression suggests that the dynamics of nonviolence are going as expected, that we are in control, and that the campaign is about to swing in our favour.

This choice of remaining firm, backing down or resorting to violence in the face of repression can be illustrated on an individual level as well as in the context of the campaign. One common tactic in nonviolent intervention is the “sitting in front of bulldozers” syndrome. Most people contemplating such action in the course of a nonviolent blockade would accept that violence against the bulldozer or the driver was not appropriate (although it cannot be stressed too often) but it is fairly common to find people who do not anticipate being injured because they intend moving before the bulldozer reaches them.
As was stated above backing down reinforces the idea that repression works. It is extremely unlikely that a bulldozer driver will deliberately run over a demonstrator in cold blood, no matter how strong his or her feelings are on the issue. However if the driver gets the idea that edging up to the people on the ground will persuade them to move, the stage is set for someone to get run over by accident. Moving is not a decision that affects us alone. If we move we are setting the scene for disaster if the next person is determined not to move. If we decide to sit in front of bulldozers, we must be clear and determined that we will not back down. It is not a question of commitment. It is a question of our responsibility to others in the campaign who may have decided to remain seated. People should not place themselves or be placed by others in situations of risk without having made a conscious decision to accept the full consequences of the action without backing down.
“A wiser role would be to make up your mind soberly will what you want, peace or war, and then get ready for what you want; for what we prepare for is what we shall get.”

William Graham Sumner

Images of violence

A lot of people harbor the misconception that nonviolence means simply not reacting to provocation. Nonviolence must however be shown to go much deeper than this. The dynamics of nonviolence work on and involve the public, the opponent’s forces and the media as well as the nonviolent group. Image is, in many ways, more important than actions. It remains with people as memories, as media film, or as photographs. Images of violence and aggression can be projected without physical violence occurring.

Figure 4: Fowldes Park, Auckland, September 12th, 1981
Violence has often been mentioned as a significant feature of the 1981 Springbok tour of New Zealand. It is widely accepted among the non-protester public that demonstrators resorted to violence on numerous occasions, and in a sense they are right because although there were few instances where protesters attacked police or rugby supporters, the media projected image was clearly one of violence.

The effect of image is clearly seen in photographs of different crowds during the tour. Figure 1 is a demonstration in Dunedin on the day of the first Springbok game. Figure 2 is the front line of a demonstration a few weeks later in Christchurch. The first photograph projects a feeling of openness and fun; the other, a feeling of guarded aggression. Even within the same demonstration there can be different images. Figures 5 and 6 are two parts of the march during the last Test in Auckland - the Artist Against Apartheid group with no helmets, no padding, and carrying huge coloured banners, and Patu squad with its helmets, padding and shields.
On a personal level, compare the image projected by the clowns in figure 3 and the “warriors” in figure 4. Who looks more likely to adhere to a policy of nonviolence? Does the person (is it even a person?) in figure 4 look as if he or she is intending to be nonviolent? Or does s/he look like a person preparing for a violent clash with the police?

One principle of nonviolence is that we should try and break down stereotypes. We must appear as individuals, and we should treat the opposition as individuals. Not only does the padding look violent, but it creates a barrier which makes it difficult to break down the stereotyped roles of “police” and “demonstrator” that’s making it easier to hate/attack the other side because they are a “type” not a “person”. They are “communists” or “students”, therefore not people. We should be working to break down such stereotypes, not reinforcing them.

What is the effect of such images on the police? Figure 7 was taken in Auckland from police lines looking down the hill towards Patu squad. What would you feel if you were a police officer in that line? Would you feel threatened? After all the demonstrators claimed to be nonviolent. Is it possible that police, faced with
such a crowd, felt in some danger personally and therefore overreacted under stress or out of fear for their own safety?

If we assume that it is desirable to appear nonviolent we are still faced with the dilemma that not wearing some protection exposes demonstrators to some risk. It is hard to tell someone not to wear a helmet thus exposing them to possible injury, especially when they argue that saving oneself from injury is not violent. What then is the answer?

First, as mentioned earlier, when we go to a demonstration we must accept personal responsibility for ourselves and not place ourselves in situations where we may be injured if we are not prepared for that risk. If, through our aggressive appearance, we incite the police to the point of attacking the crowd, we are partly responsible for the resulting injuries. If it is a non-violent demonstration we must not take part wearing clothes which compromise our nonviolence because it places others in the demonstration at risk. However even more importantly it does not guarantee our own safety.

During the Springbok tour, police violence was met with ever-increasing levels of protection by demonstrators yet injuries
increased. The more padding was worn, the more frustrated the police; the more frustrated they became, the harder they attacked. Police initially moved against demonstrators using their batons in a prodding motion at waist level. If, due to padding two or three blows did not stop the person, the baton was swung at the demonstrator’s face (figure 8). Most of the serious injuries during the tour were facial. They mostly occurred in people who were well padded and whose faces were the only unprotected place to hurt, or to people in the immediate vicinity of a lot of well padded demonstrators. In Auckland during the last test, there was more padding than anywhere else. There were also the most injuries (figure 9.)

If padding is no protection against violence what is? Do we have to accept injuries as inevitable in a confrontation situation? The answer of course is no. We can minimize injuries in even the most confrontational demonstration if we act nonviolently, and a nonviolent attitude will in most cases prevent the situation escalating to the point where violence is likely. By projecting a nonviolent image (no padding, open and non-aggressive
behaviour and by treating the opponent as individuals rather than stereotyping them), would we reduce the potential for violence? As well as using the image of nonviolence to prevent the situation escalating out of control, we can make use of techniques which project a nonviolent attitude and thus regaining the initiative even when violence is being used against us.

Such techniques are designed to reduce the appearance of threat on the part of the nonviolent group thereby isolating and highlighting the violence and its source. Techniques include

- Visually isolating the source of violence through sitting or lying down.
- Reducing the dynamic nature of the group by remaining still rather than advancing or retreating thus reducing the image of threat to the opponent.
- Clearly separating the nonviolent group from the opponent thus emphasizing the source of the violence.

Figure 9: Marlborough St, Auckland, September 12th, 1981
Sitting or lying down can effectively combine a reduced threat with visibly highlighting the actions of the opponent. The image projected to the opponent and the media by a seated crowd is far different from that projected by group of demonstrators standing arms linked in rows. If the image is seen on TV is of a seated crowd, it is much harder for the police to say that they were holding police lines and defending themselves against an aggressive crowd. It is also very difficult to use batons effectively on a seated crowd without them being very visible to TV cameras and photographers. The long batons used by police in New Zealand are designed to be used waist level against the standing crowd where they are largely invisible to cameras.

In Christchurch during the 2nd Test a group slipped past police lines and ran to the main gates, several hundred metres inside the restricted area. The police attacked the crowd and the demonstrators responded by immediately sitting down. Despite the fact that the group was clearly breaking the law by being
inside the restricted area, and despite the fact that the very same members of the Blue Squad had batoned a stationary (but standing with arms linked) crowd much further from the ground only an hour earlier, the police did nothing. They stood while the crowds sat and sang. There was no attempt to move the demonstrators. The image presented by the seated crowd was such that it did not permit the use of batons to enforce the law.

While sitting down is more effective, in some situations just remaining still can remove the threat. A moving crowd, whether it is advancing on the police or not, has a dynamic element that can lead to aggression on the part of the police. Ross Meurant, second-in-command of Red Squad (one of the two special riot squads established for the Tour) said of the invasion of the field in Hamilton that batons could have been used to stop the crowd invading the ground, but once the crowd was stationary on the field there was no justification to use force. Trespass is not an offence police can legitimately use violence to contain, whereas a moving crowd is creating disorder that can justify the use of

strong force to contain. If the crowd on the field had sat down, the effect would have been even greater.

The third technique we can use to stop violence against the nonviolent group is separating the group from the opponent. This isolates the violence from the general crowd, and provides a nonviolent barrier that the opponent must cross to continue the violence. In Dunedin and other areas peacekeepers in the march stood with their backs to police lines as a human barrier between police and demonstrators. Providing a line of clear nonviolent people can diffuse the situation from both sides, presenting those in the demonstration who wish to violently confront police with a barrier, as well as keeping the police from the crowd. Police are less likely to baton peacekeepers in the back than they are to attack a standing crowd facing them. This proved true even when (as in figure 10) the peacekeepers were wearing helmets, thus reducing the image of nonviolence.

If all else fails, and violence occurs against the nonviolent group, the effects are far different than they would be if the image the group presents is violent and aggressive. During the Springbok tour there were numerous injuries, some extremely serious. The media attention to these injuries was insignificant. However on the day of the last Test in Auckland, three of the clowns in figure 3 were attacked by members of the Red Squad and received severe neck and head injuries. Media response was immediate and strong. There were demands from media, the public, and sections within the police that those responsible for batoning the clowns be found and disciplined. Extensive investigations were made (unfortunately without finding the officers concerned) and this incident played a very large part in destroying the image of the Red Squad as protectors of law and order. Ultimately it provided a strong counter-argument to those who wished to keep the riot squads in existence permanently, which resulted in the eventual disbandment of the Red Squad and other squads formed for crowd control. The image of the clowns being batoned lived on longer than the memory of the helmeted, shield carrying demonstrators being injured (figure 11).
Finally, part of the image of nonviolence or violence is internalized. If people head into a confrontation dressed for physical battle, they are half prepared and almost expecting it. We may have an intellectual acceptance of the importance of nonviolence but when we are walking the tightrope between a nonviolent intent and a violent image, in the heat of the moment it is very easy to fall the wrong way. One incident can escalate out of control in a matter of moments with far-reaching consequences. Remaining nonviolent in a conflict situation needs an intellectual appreciation of the dynamics and issues involved. It also needs an appreciation of the visual impact of nonviolent image. It needs a moral or emotional commitment to nonviolence.

You need to feel secure in your belief that nonviolence will work, and that nonviolence is the best way to achieve the results you desire. Above all it needs training of all those involved so that everyone is aware of the dynamics, the image, the need for nonviolence, and what nonviolence really is.

It is a lot more than not hitting your opponent first.
Allan Cumming was a member of the Nonviolent Action Network in Aotearoa throughout the 1980s. He first became involved in nonviolence training in 1972, and has conducted workshops across Aotearoa and Australia. He was involved in the Save Aramoana Campaign, which prevented the building of an Aluminium Smelter in Dunedin; the anti-apartheid movement; and the peace and environmental movements. He was involved in the founding of Peace Movement Aotearoa, Peace Action Dunedin, and Peacelink magazine. He has written and presented widely on nonviolence, direct action, and civilian based defence. Allan currently works in quality improvement in healthcare.
How Nonviolence Works
and
Understanding Nonviolence

These two short booklets were written in the early 1980s, a time of active anti-apartheid, anti-nuclear and environmental protest. We believe that the messages and principles in these two short works are as relevant today as they were then, and hope they have stood the test of time.

What is nonviolence? How can oppressed groups reclaim their power? Why is it crucial to remain firm in the face of repression?

*How Nonviolence Works* addresses these questions by looking at the underlying principles of nonviolent direct action.

Drawing on practical experience, and examples of nonviolent campaigns for social change in Aotearoa and elsewhere, the book examines

- Definitions of nonviolence
- Controversies about nonviolence
- The nonviolent theory of personal and political power
- The development of a nonviolent direct action campaign
- The dynamics of nonviolent direct action

As an appendix to this edition of *How Nonviolence Works*, we have included *Understanding Nonviolence*, also by Allan Cumming. This pamphlet was written shortly after the 1981 Springbok Tour of New Zealand, and focuses on the effect images of violence can have on a nonviolent campaign.