



The Threat of Non-Violence

By Potemkin

*“Drop that Flower, Comrade, and
Pick Up Your Gun!”*

Online Edition 1.01: Zine Library, Apr. 2007



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Drop that Flower, Comrade, and Pick Up Your Gun!

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While I agree with the content of the quoted text throughout this work, I disagree strongly with the sometimes sexist language used to express it.

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Open your eyes, comrades, to that dark cloud that hangs above us! It is an insidious storm-front that has already co-opted the revolutionary movement with its agents of loyal opposition (1) and threatens to drown us all in our own blood - without a shot being fired in our own defense.

Such is the policy of non-violence: a contrivance that serves only to perpetuate existing cycles of violence and suffering. It is the catharsis of the impotent!

This paper brings forth four major charges to the policy of non-violence as promoted within the left in the United States:

1. Non-violence achieves nothing;
2. Non-violence creates violence:
 - (a) By triggering violent reaction from the agencies its adherents target (2) and;
 - (b) By remaining loyal to this system of government that is inherently violent;
3. Actual non-violent practice is impossible in our contemporary society based on an inherently violent system – a grave hypocrisy;
4. The policy of non-violence is a tool of Bourgeois Liberalism and necessarily counter-revolutionary.

Furthermore, it will be brought to the reader's attention that even (or especially) those that advocate revolutionary violence, in so doing, are striving to bring about the change to a truly peaceful society free of the governments, corporations, and systems that make individuals accomplice to violence, oppression, and injustice.

Drop that flower, and pick up your gun!"

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(1) See Bourgeois Liberalism*

(2) See William Meyers, "Nonviolence and its Violent Consequences"

(3) See Tuvalu

(4) See Martin Luther King, Gandhi, et al

(5) See Stalinism, Maoism

(6) Non-violent in the sense that no human or animal need be injured or killed in carrying out these acts.

*Note: One of the definitions put forward to delineate classic bourgeois liberals (loyal opposition) and radicals is the belief by the former that changing the mind of the individual can bring about change (within the current system of government), leaving the current system intact and unaltered. Their belief in the fundamental goodness of the current system is contrasted with the attitude of radicals, who believe that the current system is the main obstacle to sweeping humanitarian changes in society, and that the current system of government should be abolished completely, though what is to replace it is a matter of contention (Marxist-Leninists advocate an authoritarian "dictatorship of the proletariat," while Anarchists advocate no replacement to federal government and instead opt for self government).

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References:

Malatesta, Errico - Anarchism and Violence (www.zinelibrary.net)

Meyers, William - Non-Violence and its Violent Consequences (www.zinelibrary.net)

A special thank you to Jaina for suggestion and inspiration. Forever yours in love and struggle.

government that supports them.

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In the end, to achieve the peaceful society we strive for, violence cannot be avoided. The current system and its defenders will see to that. The bourgeoisie will not be expropriated without a fight.

In an Anarcho-Communist context, non-violence is the goal we are all striving for. I want to live in a world free of the threat of violence; free of coercion and of unnecessary pain and suffering. Allowing this system to continue on its current course is a violent decision – one that will affect many more, over a much greater span of time, than working to expropriate the Bourgeoisie in the here and now.

Realizing this, it is our responsibility to minimize the violence caused by our lifestyle toward our fellow comrades – workers and slaves throughout the world – and expedite the arrival of our post-revolutionary society by focusing that violence on the institutions that coerce and kill – namely our corporations, government, and their systems.

Comrades, the policy of non-violence has betrayed us! Non-violence has shown itself to be a counter-revolutionary policy that reinforces and perpetuates the current regime of violence.

If left unopposed, this regime will continue its cycle of suffering and death in perpetuity. The casualties from adopting non-violent strategies are far more than those that would stem from the timely overthrow of this violent system.

I now say unto you, "Minimize the violence you would create against your fellow comrades by your interactions and lifestyles and concentrate it upon those who, through economic, political, or military power commit violence on a much higher order than that of an individual of average means! Those that would be your oppressors, dominators, exploiters not only commit violence directly, through your wage-slave imprisonment and authoritarian power, but also indirectly by creating, fostering, and protecting the system that allows such violence to occur. This is a call to arms!

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"We are not 'pacifists' because peace is not possible unless it is desired by both sides."

- Errico Malatesta

Before diving into the incompetencies and failures of the policy of non-violence, it is prudent to determine if such a policy can even exist in contemporary society.

It is an inescapable fact that the Empire of the United States is inherently violent. Not only does she sell her citizens into wage-slavery for the benefit and profit of her government and the corporations it represents, but with her twin pistols of economy and society to their heads, she forces upon them a lifestyle that kills and enslaves the greater population of the planet.

Citizens, we all have blood on our hands! Cannot you see the connection, the correlation, between the SUV and the disappearance of small island nations (3); between the gasoline used to fuel that SUV and unrest in the Middle East (particularly the current, despicable war of U.S. imperialism), the hole in the ozone, and exploitations of the peoples of the third world; between the cheap Wal-Mart sweater and the Asian shops that put the "sweat" in the name?

We are forced into relationships (work or starve – the great American freedom) with violent institutions - the corporations, whose goal is profit at any cost, and their government - both as consumer and employee, that bloody our hands by association. How long will we allow this to continue?

By fate's hand, we have been born into a system that not only enslaves us, but forces us into active participation in the exploitation, suffering, and death of the planet, her animals, and her peoples. Where is the outrage, citizen, for your "American Way of Life?"

Non-violence at an individual level is impossible when placed within the framework of these all-encompassing institutions of blood.

Indeed, the rationale of one that purchases their necessities from Wal-Mart, earning the means for the purchase by selling themselves to a large multinational, and traveling from their place of employment to the store to make their purchase via their SUV, yet calls for “resistance” to the current order by waving a flag or holding a sign (traditionally with permit in hand in their designated “free speech zone”) on the grounds that non-violence is the righteous path toward change is dubious to be sure.

At best, this “non-violent” mentality is a blatant disregard for the plight of fellow citizens suffering around the world - a plight directly stemming from the choices and actions of that non-violent adherent. At worst, it is an explicit approval of the criminal system that makes such suffering possible, including the adherent’s own role and participation.

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What are the strategies of “non-violence” currently employed by the so-called non-violent movement? Allow us to analyze:

Passive Resistance: This includes mainly “peaceful” demonstration (flag waving, marching, sign holding, chanting, etc.).

Satyagraha: Gandhi’s “non-violent civil resistance,” which includes passive resistance along with other, more militant and self-punishing tactics.

I will defer to Malatesta’s critique of Passive Resistance:

“Anarchists are beginning to pay serious attention to the party of passive resistance, whose basic principle is that the individual must allow himself and others to be persecuted and despised rather than harm the aggressor...”

“A man may, if he is... very good... suffer every kind of provocation without defending himself with every weapon at his disposal, and still remain a moral man. But would he not, in practice, even unconsciously, be a supreme egoist were he to allow others to be persecuted without making any effort to defend them? If, for instance, he were to prefer that a class should be reduced to abject misery, that a people should be

perhaps all other forms of direct action are eliminated as tactics because they are “violent.”

The violence of non-violent advocates includes damage of any kind to anything, living or not, as well as threats, intimidation, defense, and self-defense. This leaves only non-violent demonstration (marches, rallies, etc.) and civil disobedience to bring about a peaceful society - an impossibility, as we have demonstrated.

Therefore, we must begin to define non-violence in a realistic way. We must start to include economic sabotage, property destruction and other direct action, as effective non-violent (δ) tactics.

But we must go further. Redefining non-violence will give those insistent upon indulging in the non-violence hypocrisy the tools and possibility of effective, revolutionary change. We must come to terms, however, with the fact that each and every one of us is a murderer – a situation that cannot change until the system is overthrown.

So-called violent activity, such as that listed earlier, which most reasonable people could agree is not overtly violent, accomplishes much more, much faster than adopting a policy of non-violence. Note for instance, the great success of the animal liberation movement in shutting down slaughterhouses, testing facilities, vivisection labs and more, in addition to doing millions of dollars in combined property damage – all without killing or injuring one human or animal life. And let us not forget the countless animals rescued!

We must realize that as a citizen in the context of United States imperialism, our lives are saturated with the pain and suffering of those forced to supply us with the makings of our lifestyle – a lifestyle forced upon us against our will (a violent act in itself). In knowing this – that we cannot be non-violent within the current system – we must work to minimize violence toward our fellow comrades worldwide – the Asian seamstress; the underage California shoemaker; the Indian farmer. Instead we must focus this unavoidable violence on the institutions that uphold the current order – the Wal-Marts, the Nikes, the Monsanto’s – along with the

However, violence, regardless of its degree, whether direct or indirect, leads to the same outcome: suffering and death. Therefore, there is no obligation to attempt to respond to violence with a similar level of might. The only requirement should be to respond strong enough to prevent the future suffering and death of others by the oppressor. The question when responding to acts of violence is not one of restraint, but of time.

We have an obligation to put down this current system and those that would perpetuate it in as timely a manner as possible, in so doing limiting the number of people – currently alive and future generations – affected by the violence stemming from it. It is not a matter of degrees of violence – it is a matter of timeliness and minimizing the number of people affected by its use.

In our struggle, we must remember that more of humanity exists after us than is currently alive or has ever come before. Therefore, we must be mindful of the future. In order to minimize the violence perpetuated, we have an obligation to fight for the most expedient end to the current system. No longer can we bide our time! Patience has now become as much of an enemy as the oppressor itself. We cannot afford to delay, it is now that we must act!

Self-Defense: According to William Meyers, “[self-defense] is a far better principle (when extended to the idea of community defense and defense of mother earth) to use as a starting point than Nonviolence.”

Indeed, how long are we willing to watch our fellow comrades suffer and die at the hands of a doctrine that denies us the ability to utilize all the methods at our disposal to effect revolutionary change? How long are we willing to witness their suffering without response? To not act in the face of suffering itself is a violence upon the world.

Redefining Non-Violence: The left is (or should be) united in trying to create a peaceful (and therefore non-violent) world. However, the definition adhered to by non-violent advocates precludes any effective strategies for bringing this world about. In many cases, monkeywrenching, property destruction, direct confrontation, and

downtrodden by an invader, that man's life or liberty should be abused, rather than bruise the flesh of the oppressor?

“...[M]ore often than not, to profess passive resistance only serves to reassure the oppressors against their fears of rebellion, and thus it betrays the cause of the oppressed.

“For myself, I would violate every principle in the world in order to save a man...”

-Errico Malatesta

Indeed, we have all seen the violent reaction that supposedly non-violent demonstrations generate. I have witnessed it firsthand. The policy of non-violence provokes a militant and violent response from “authorities”, against which participants are unwilling to defend. A violent response is easy for the party that knows retaliation will not come, and a natural and unsurprising reaction from a system based on competition instead of cooperation; intimidation instead of mutual aid.

Additionally, in provoking a violent reaction, non-violent demonstration brings more violence into the world than would have otherwise existed – a violence against the least deserving; a violence that goes unanswered. Is not failing to attempt to counter violence a decision of violence?

In addition, the simple question, “What have these tactics accomplished?” should immediately put down any notion of the effectiveness of the policy of non-violence in achieving revolutionary change (or any other change, for that matter).

The policy of non-violence has accomplished only the suffering and death of its adherents! (4)

Since the wane of spirited resistance last witnessed in the early to mid- 70s with groups like the Weather Underground, Black Panthers, and others, non-violence has correlatively come to dominate the strategies of the left in the United States and elsewhere. The current period of peaceful demonstration has resulted only in the murder, beating, and violent reaction of the government toward a population they do not see as a threat.

Even, or particularly, in the realm of reform, the non-violence-dominated left has witnessed staggering losses in recent years – from embarrassing environmental protection and quality, to the instability of social security, to Fascist treatment of immigrants and border issues.

Additionally, one of the key aspects of non-violent demonstration is its fetishizing of the attention of media (a bourgeois distraction) – proof that fundamentally, the policy of non-violence is reformist at best, counter-revolutionary at worst.

More focus must be placed on actual damage to capital – propaganda of the deed that generates concrete results and less imprisonment. The goal should be to stay out of jail and do our most important work, than to be arrested for theatre and hope to make the local news.

Indeed, more than a “peace demo,” it seems, is needed for change to occur.

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“...the revolution as conceived by the Anarchists is the least violent of all and seeks to halt all violence as soon as the need to use force to oppose that of the government and the Bourgeoisie ceases.

“Anarchists recognize violence only as a means of legitimate defense, and if today they are in favor of violence it is because they maintain that slaves are always in a state of legitimate defense. But the Anarchist ideal is for a society in which the factor of violence has been eliminated, and their ideal serves to restrain, correct, and destroy the spirit of revenge which revolution, as a physical act, would tend to develop.

“In any case, the remedy would never be the organization and consolidation of violence in the hands of a government or dictatorship, which cannot be founded on anything but brute force and recognition for the authority of police - and military - forces.”

-Errico Malatesta

As we have seen, the practice of “non-violence” is a counter-revolutionary tactic exercised by the agents of bourgeois

liberalism. The non-violence tactic leads to violence toward its adherents and those unlucky enough to be mixed in with their lot, and reinforces the current order of domination and exploitation by corporations and their government.

Additionally, we have shown that true non-violence within contemporary society is an impossibility, due to the very system the policy of non-violence strives to protect, leading to a grave hypocrisy.

With this established, it can now be asked, “What is to be done?”

It is correct that within the confines of the system in which we find ourselves, we have limited courses of action. We can and must, however, adopt a strategy of violence minimization and redirection, using the following alternatives to non-violence:

Anarchist Violence: According to Malatesta, Anarchist violence differentiates itself from traditional, authoritarian, direct-violence in that Anarchist violence ends at the precise moment the threat of fascism and capitalism have been eliminated.

In contrast, Authoritarian Communist violence traditionally does not end once these threats have been eliminated (5), and instead violence is directed toward the people themselves, effectively replacing the dictatorship of empire with one of Authoritarian Communism.

Violence Minimization: We must minimize the violence we cause to each other, fellow comrades worldwide, and instead focus it solely on the source of our enslavement - the current system of government and the corporations it supports. In so doing, we are aiding those whose suffering is tied integrally to our own: through the products and lifestyles forced upon us; through the corporate exploiters we uphold by selling ourselves to them, overwhelmingly against our will.

Any violence directed at corporate and government institutions and their system must only be to the degree necessary to eliminate further aggression on the part of the exploiters, as well as their capacity for further aggression.