
MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT NONVIOLENT DIRECT ACTION

HANDOUT

1. Nonviolent action has nothing to do with passivity, submissiveness, and cowardice; just as in violent action, these must first be rejected and overcome.
2. Nonviolent action is not to be equated with verbal or purely psychological persuasion, although it may use action to induce psychological pressures for attitude change; nonviolent action, instead of words, is a sanction and a technique of struggle involving the use of social, economic, and political power, and the matching of forces in conflict.
3. Nonviolent action does not depend on the assumption that people are inherently “good”; the potentialities of people for both “good” and “evil” are recognized, including the extremes of cruelty and inhumanity.
4. People using nonviolent action do not have to be pacifists or saints; nonviolent action has been predominantly and successfully practiced by “ordinary” people.
5. Success with nonviolent action does not require (though it may be helped by) shared standards and principles, a high degree of community of interest, or a high degree of psychological closeness between the contending groups; this is because when efforts to produce voluntary change fail, coercive nonviolent measures may be employed.
6. Nonviolent action is at least as much of a Western phenomenon as an Eastern one; indeed, it is probably more Western, if one takes into account the widespread use of strikes and boycotts in the labor movement and the noncooperation struggles of subordinated nationalities.
7. In nonviolent action there is no assumption that the opponent will refrain from using violence against nonviolent actionists; the technique is designed to operate against violence when necessary.
8. There is nothing in nonviolent action to prevent it from being used for both “good” and “bad” causes although the social consequences of its use for a “bad” cause may differ considerably from the consequences of violence used for the same cause.
9. Nonviolent action is not limited to domestic conflicts within a democratic system; it has been widely used against dictatorial regimes, foreign occupations, and even against totalitarian systems.
10. Nonviolent action does not always take longer to produce victory than violent struggle would. In a variety of cases nonviolent struggle has won objectives in a very short time — in as little as a few days. The time taken to achieve victory depends on diverse factors — primarily on the strength of the nonviolent actionists.

SOURCE:
*Gene Sharp, The Politics of
Nonviolent Action*
