

Handout 1

Introduction to Nonviolent Resistance

(From The International Center for Nonviolent Conflict website:
<http://www.nonviolenceinternational.net/seasia/whatis/book.php#top>)

In recent years there has been a dramatic increase in the number of people around the world who have taken part in nonviolent political action. At first glance, violence may appear to be a superior technique for resolving conflicts or achieving desired ends because it has obvious and tangible strategies and weapons. Nonviolent techniques are often more difficult to visualize and there is no shortage of moral and practical dilemmas that skeptics are able to raise as impediments to taking nonviolence seriously.

Yet many reasons can be offered for the employment of nonviolence: it is a 'weapon' available to all, it is least likely to alienate opponents and third parties, it breaks the cycle of violence and counter-violence. It leaves open the possibility of conversion, it ensures that the media focus on the issue at hand rather than some tangential act of violence and it is the surest way of achieving public sympathy. Further, it is more likely to produce a constructive rather than a destructive outcome, it is a method of conflict resolution that may aim to arrive at the truth of a given situation (rather than mere victory for one side) and it is the only method of struggle that is consistent with the teachings of the major religions.

In addition there are reasons for the employment of nonviolence that go beyond the conviction that is a useful, or even the only 'correct' method of conflict resolution. Nonviolence can also be the basis for a way of life: it is consistent with a belief in the underlying unity of humankind and it is the only method of action, interpersonal or political, that does not block that path to what has often been called 'self-realization.'

Questions for Discussion:

- Why may violence appear to be the superior technique to achieve goals at first glance?
- What are some of the strategic reasons for using nonviolent techniques, according to the reading?
- In what ways can nonviolence “be the basis for a way of life,” according to the reading?