

Sending the Protest Message

*Jørgen Johansen
Brian Martin*

WHAT MAKES A protest action effective? Organisers have lots of potential choices: what, when, where, how and who. Looking at how audiences are likely to respond to messages can give guidance.

Heads of government are coming to town. Let's organise a protest! We'll have a massive rally and march. Those who want to can blockade the venue. We'll make our concerns about inequality, exploitation and aggression known far and wide.

But wait a second! Is this sort of protest going to be effective? Is it going to change people's viewpoints, mobilise support and help bring about a better society? Or, instead, will it enforce prejudices, alienate potential supporters and suck energy away from more effective initiatives? And anyway what does it mean to "be effective"?

There are no simple answers to these questions. Actions have many different impacts. Many are hard to measure and some are entirely overlooked. Weighing up the pros and cons is difficult: it's an emotional as well as a rational matter.

Context

Actions need to be designed with the context in mind. What is appropriate in one situation could be completely counterproductive in another. Laws, media, police, culture, religion, civil society and many other factors are very different in Burkina Faso, Germany, Nepal, Indonesia, and China.

In India, in 1930, Gandhi chose to build a campaign around salt, a potent symbol for Indians because of the British salt laws. What

January–March 2008

could protesters use as a potent symbol in Swaziland or Sweden today?

Actions must be designed with a deep knowledge of the local conditions. As a general rule, success stories should never be copied, but they can function as inspirations and as useful cases from which to learn.

Open-ended hunger strikes are regarded very differently in a Christian culture than in a Hindu society. For atheists and Christians it means a lot to sacrifice your life, whereas a Hindu anticipates thousands more lives to come — an important difference!

In a country where an activist risks torture, lengthy imprisonment or the death penalty, civil disobedience is a different matter than where the likely outcome is a fine or a few weeks in a decent prison. It is wise for activists to act differently in countries with strict censorship and state-run media than where free and oppositional media regularly cover demonstrations.

Choices

There are two main types of actions: (1) oppose and (2) promote. The first focuses on what you disagree with and the other on your alternative. Within each of these there are many options. In most cases, it's much easier to create a positive image when you have an alternative. To say '*no*' is common and easy, but it will often be regarded as unhelpful, as blocking progress. To present alternatives is more demanding, but often rewarded by being seen as constructive.

Within each of these main categories there is again a choice to be made: direct action or indirect action. By direct action we mean to do something about the problem/conflict ourselves. It could be to close a city street to change it into a space for pedestrians. Or it could be to squat in a house and turn it into a cultural centre. When the activists in Genetix Snowball destroy genetically modified plants from fields in Britain they are not only demanding that these fields should be made illegal but are removing them themselves.¹ These types of actions are often illegal and risky. The point here is that the activists themselves are making the change directly: they are taking direct action.

Indirect actions involve asking someone else, such as politicians or business executives, to respond to a demand or deal with an unjust situation. In many countries you need permission from the local police to have a demonstration and sometimes they will be helpful in keeping calm during the demo. These types of actions are dependent on sympathy from someone else in order to be successful. If neither power holders nor the public support your demands you will not

achieve what you want.

Note that in a dictatorship, making requests can be a form of direct action, because it is an exercise of free speech.

For both direct and indirect actions there is a need to develop more types of actions. Creativity, fantasy and experiments are crucial. Just as arms producers come up with more sophisticated weapons every year, activists need to develop new forms of action. Good examples should be tested, documented and adapted for use at other times, places and circumstances.

A third form of action has become popular in recent decades in some countries: pay an annual fee to professionals who act on your behalf. Greenpeace, for example, takes on such activities. It is run as a business, without any membership or local group democracy. Greenpeace asks people to donate money to its activities and then spends the income on research, lobbying and actions of many kinds. When Greenpeace does popular and effective actions it receives more money from supporters and can do more work. This sort of “proxy activism” has considerable support among middle aged, middle class people throughout the western world.

Paying proxy activists might be seen as supporting groups to do specialist actions, like sailing boats or climbing buildings, while others do what they can, like writing letters or joining boycotts. It is possible for individuals to financially support such groups while participating in other groups. It is hard to determine whether proxy activist groups are stimulating or reducing involvement in participative movements.

Some basic questions

There are several important choices in taking action.

- What is the issue? It might be corporate globalisation, violence against women, genetic engineering or militarism.
- What are the core elements of the issue? For genetically modified food, a core element might be health risks, with other issues being promotion of sustainable agriculture or citizen participation in decision-making.
- What is the occasion? It might be an event such as an arms fair, an international celebration like May Day or an ongoing issue like sex slavery.
- Would it be better to arrange the event at another, better time?
- Are the issues well known, or is it wise to have an “educational campaign” first?
- What is the main target group we want to influence?
- Would it be wise to build an alliance with other groups and organise the event together? If so, which groups and organisations would be appropriate for such a cooperation?

January–March 2008

- What sort of action should be organised? There are many options, such as a rally, march, strike, boycott, sabotage or vigil. Is it safe or risky? Which types of actions will have best effect in this specific case?
- Where and when?
- Who is involved? Is the protest restricted to a few or built around broad participation? Who is involved in planning and running the action?
- Do we have a good follow-up plan for unexpected incidents?
- How can we expect the authorities to react?
- What are the likely reactions from those the action is directed towards?
- What are the likely reactions from different media? Can we improve media coverage by designing the action differently?
- How will members of the general public react?

There's a lot to consider. Activists need to spend time discussing what they want to achieve, and how. There are bound to be disagreements, because different activists have different motivations and goals.

To get a handle on basic questions, it's useful to look at the potential audiences of an action.

Audiences

On many issues there are three main groups: activists, opponents and third parties. When a group wants to challenge a repressive government, the activists are those involved in protests. The opponents are the government and its agencies such as the police and the army. The third parties are those not directly involved in the struggle: the general public and most people in other countries. People can move from being a third party to being an activist, and the other way around, as a consequence of actions. One goal is to engage more people. In most cases the media are carriers of information/propaganda and messages from the event to wider audiences.

As well as looking at who the audiences are, it's helpful to look at the interaction between activist methods and audiences.²

1. Persuading the opponent

Leaflets, articles, banners, graffiti, delegations, public meetings, websites, emails — lots of the methods regularly used by activists are designed to persuade opponents using evidence, arguments and a demonstration of commitment. Of course nothing will persuade some opponents, such as the ruler of a repressive regime. But others, such as troops, might be convinced by appropriate materials,

especially if they were misled or coerced into their positions.

We cannot expect soldiers, judges or police to change immediately, but there are several examples of actions influencing their attitudes so that over time they shift sides. An illegal vigil against a planned nuclear waste repository in Sweden lasted more than 19 years. Many local policemen, whose job was to arrest protesters, some years later decided to join their ranks. On one of the annual meetings of the campaign, the local police choir entertained the activists with their songs.

It is important to remember that police, soldiers, politicians and others who are regarded as opponents have more than one role in life. A policewoman can also have roles as football player, mother, politician, friend, neighbour and lover. She may be difficult to persuade while in her police role but will be easier to reach through some of the other roles.

A well constructed action should try to reach more than one of the roles. On 5 October 2000, Serbian soldiers guarding the parliament building in Belgrade were ordered to shoot at the masses trying to occupy the building. The soldiers did not respond, in part because many of them were also fathers of young activists in the crowd. They knew this in advance and, while they stood on the stairs at the main entrance, they were reminded of it by the activists in the front of the crowd.

For persuasion it is probably better to focus on constructive actions and presenting reliable alternatives as well as protesting against what is regarded harmful. Blockades of nuclear power stations worldwide in the past several decades have been complemented by efforts to insulate houses, build wind power, reduce energy consumption and prove that it is cheaper and safer to save energy rather than produce more. Activists can both oppose the bad and promote alternatives.

2. Coercing the opponent

Strikes, boycotts, social ostracism, fasts, sabotage, blockades — these put pressure on opponents, without necessarily persuading them. If these methods are successful, they cause the opponent to begin to change, perhaps by instituting reforms or by opening dialogue with challengers.

Activists planning such actions should consider the short and long term. Sometimes a short term victory can result in a worse situation later; sometimes a short term loss can be beneficial in the long term. The Clamshell Alliance's 1978 blockade against the Seabrook nuclear power plant in New Hampshire was an inspiration for future actions against nuclear power worldwide and therefore should be counted

January–March 2008

as successful even though the plant was completed. Subsequent large scale protests contributed to the lack of interest in building more nuclear power in the West in later decades.

Methods to coerce the opponent were central in the strategy used by the trade union movement Solidarity in its struggle against the communist dictatorship in Poland from 1980-1989.³ Solidarity was the first movement within the East European bloc to successfully remove a communist regime.

3. Winning over third parties

All these methods can be used to gain support from individuals and groups not directly involved in the struggle. These so-called third parties can exert enormous influence. For example, in the international campaign against apartheid in South Africa, solidarity groups in other countries pressured international corporations to withdraw investments in the country. Sometimes there's a long chain of influence.⁴ Black activists in South Africa tried to persuade local church people to support the anti-apartheid struggle. South African church figures appealed to their counterparts in other countries, who in turn supported the disinvestment efforts and used personal connections within their own governments.⁵

The media play a key role in winning over third parties. Activists often hope the mass media will report on their initiatives, making them known to non-participants who may be inspired to support or join the campaign. Workers in the mass media, including journalists and editors, are themselves third parties as well as serving as a channel to other third parties. However, sometimes coverage declines over time as protest becomes routine and is treated as "old news." Protesters, to attract continuing media interest, may escalate their actions, attracting attention through novelty, disruption and violence, sometimes leading to more negative coverage and at the expense of participation and solidarity. This is a common dilemma when activists perform for the mass media.⁶

Some forms of media, such as the telephone, websites and blogs, can be used directly, without any intermediaries. Excellent examples of good media coverage are the actions by Greenpeace against air pollution. The first time activists climbed up a chimney and unfurled a banner with words like "Toxic Crime" they received enormous attention. Television and newspapers all over the place reported on this spectacular action and it was impossible to cover such an action without having the message up front. So a huge audience got the message into their living rooms. This was the perfect balance between being spectacular and having the message in focus. The third party

was reached and influenced. This helped people to understand air pollution as a social problem.

To reach a third party through media is not easy. Many actions are either so spectacular that the media focus only on the amazing aspects or so boring that they don't care to cover it at all. When Greenpeace climb up chimney number 300 it is not the same effect as the first time. Maybe the local media will turn up, but CNN gets tired after a handful of similar actions. There is a need for creativity.

One vexing factor, for those who want to disseminate their message through mainstream media, is violence. When there are violent confrontations, even if they involve only a few individuals out of thousands of protesters, you can bet the media will highlight the clashes. It doesn't matter "who started" the confrontation — police, provocateurs, protesters or counter-protesters — because violence inevitably grabs media attention. Hence, in planning an action, it is wise to minimise possibilities for violence. Specific exercises to eliminate violent individuals and tactical planning for reducing the effect of violent incidents are helpful.

Different people perceive violence in different ways. Civil disobedience aimed at damaging a missile will be seen differently from actions like throwing bricks through windows or at police.

Sometimes, when police use violence against protesters, this generates greater opposition. When in 1988, the opposition in Chile campaigned against an eight-year extension of Pinochet's presidential term, they were allowed 15 minutes a day on national TV. Most of that time they used to show police violence and the reaction was that more activists took part in the demonstrations. In interviews later it became clear that the courage by the activists and the brutality of the police resulted in more people daring to engage in the campaign. And the opposition won!

4. Building solidarity among activists

Activists are themselves an important audience. A public meeting or a rally can be an occasion for activists to meet each other, share information and build stronger bonds. Even if no one else knows about the action, it can be worthwhile in forging greater commitment. If the action is designed appropriately, the number of participants is not the most important thing.

Many types of actions serve both as a protest and a form of community building. Squatting, occupations and other long-term actions are like education. Afghan refugees built a tent camp outside the Norwegian parliament in July 2007. They had not been granted permission to stay in Norway, and in addition to using the tent camp

January–March 2008

as a site for a visible protest in front of the decision makers, they arranged a “Refugee Academy” with lecturers from Oslo University and other places to teach relevant topics on a daily basis. Through this academy, the refugees and their supporters were raising awareness, gaining more knowledge, and building useful skills and networks.

Linking with groups and movements globally is easier today than ever before. Electronic communication makes it cheap, easy and interesting to hook into global networks. Through Skype, Facebook, chat rooms and web-based communities more people can have personal friends from other continents than ever before.

5. Building personal commitment

Activists are individuals, with the usual range of hopes, anxieties, personal troubles and flashes of exhilaration. Communicating to the individual in a way that deepens understanding and commitment is crucially important. A cartoon, a ritual, a vigil or a few well chosen words can make a big difference to the way a person feels and hence to their future involvement.

Activists from previous generations have learned a lot about barriers to commitment, such as working too hard and trying to achieve too much — leading to burnout — making others feel guilty for not doing enough (guilt-tripping) and clashing with other activists rather than working together toward common goals. Communicating within groups, between groups and in actions needs to build on these sorts of insights.

Finding a good balance between different audiences is not easy. In the urgency to mobilise a really big rally, for example, the result might be mass action where people feel anonymous, with limited capacity for building solidarity and personal commitment. On the other hand, a small intimate action might have limited capacity to reach out to third parties.

Since the 1970s there has been a tradition within several social movements to include training and preparation for activists. Parts of the Plowshare movement spend years preparing for a single disarmament action. They risk years in prison. A lot of preparation is needed for the activist as well as family and friends for a new type of life.

Within the globalisation-critical movement there has been a move towards greater preparation. How to handle police violence? What to do if fellow activists start throwing stones? What are your rights in case of arrest? Which lawyers can you call for assistance? Who will call your family and employer in case police detain you for several

days? These and other issues are discussed and trained for.

Within several movements there is also a requirement that the participants in actions have a certain level of knowledge about the protest issue. Study circles and workshops are obligatory prior to any action. The same is done with sessions on how to handle media. Role plays in being interviewed are carried out and sometimes recorded on video in order for the activists to develop awareness about their body language, voice and general presentation.

A growing number of organisations and movements take evaluations more seriously. After actions the participants go through what happened and discuss what went well and what could be improved. The whole process, from the first idea to the last phase, is documented and can then be used for future activities.

All these elements in an action serve to educate, create commitment and in general help participants to grow as human beings.

Alignment

Media guru Marshall McLuhan said “The medium is the message.” For example, television encourages a certain way of viewing the world, irrespective of what’s on the screen. Personal conversation encourages a different perspective.

In activism, too, the medium — namely the method of action — is the message. According to a perspective in psychology called correspondent inference theory, audiences make assumptions about someone’s motivations according to the consequences of the actions they take.⁷ When activists threaten or use violence — for example, bombings, assassinations or hijackings — many observers believe the goal of the activists is to destroy society. The method, namely destruction, is assumed to reflect the goal. For example, after 9/11, many people in the US thought al Qaeda’s goal was to destroy US society. This was the wrong message. Very few US citizens knew that Osama bin Laden’s key goals concerned US government policies in the Muslim world.

The same thing applies on a much smaller scale. If a worker on a picket spits on a manager, the message is one of contempt and disrespect, which can distract audiences from the message that the pay is too low or working conditions are unsafe.

Actions are more powerful when the method used — the medium — is aligned with the message. In the US civil rights movement, well-dressed blacks entered white-only restaurants and sat politely and quietly at lunch counters, not responding to abuse and police provocation. Their presence and respectful demeanour sent a powerful message that was aligned with the short-term goal, equal

access to the restaurant, as well as the long-term goal of racial equality. On the other hand, the abuse by white patrons and aggressive action by police, directed only at blacks in the restaurant, sent the message that segregation was a system of racism, exclusion and aggression. These powerful messages helped discredit segregation among audiences in the rest of the US and the world.

Gandhi, as well as pioneering the use of strategic nonviolent action, also promoted the “constructive programme.” This was developed partly as a reaction to some of the negative reactions to his early non-cooperation actions but also because he saw the need for more self-discipline among his fellow activists. The main idea is to start building islands of the future society here and now rather than wait until the whole society has changed. A key goal was to build a structure that made the movement and the people less dependent of external support. The khadi campaign, with participants spinning, weaving and sewing their own clothes, was started in order to be self-sufficient, with no need to buy British textiles.

A more modern example is to cultivate your own food. Not being dependent on large scale farming companies, long-distance transport, artificial fertilizers and pesticides sends a more positive message than destroying fields with GM crops.

The self-discipline part of the constructive program in India included meditation, daily exercises, honesty, “non possession”, eating habits, celibacy and other rules for the individual. Such rules are seldom practised within movements today. But many activists have taken up several of these norms in their private life. Movements to change lifestyles are integrated in the more pragmatic political movements within global civil society.

But here, as for other strategies, there is a need for balance. Extremists of all sorts have difficulties in being accepted, regarded as models and listened to by those outside a movement’s inner circle. Visual attributes such as dress, hairstyle, car and house will affect how the message is received. Speakers and representatives should be chosen for their rapport with audiences. Different dress, language and style may be needed depending on whether the audience is farmers, nurses or generals.

Sometimes it is important for activists to make a statement about their own identity and styles. You don’t always have to adapt to what is expected, but it is worth considering these effects. In any action and campaign there are many functions to be filled and visual appearance often affects the results.

In many movements today, external funding is a challenging issue. The so-called colour revolutions in recent years — nonviolent regime

changes such as the orange revolution in Ukraine and the cedar revolution in Lebanon — have been financially assisted by US and other governments and a number of private institutions. Critics claim that US funding means US government agendas are served. Others, however, say these events are much more complex than just a question of money: if US dollars determined outcomes, there would be a colour revolution against every regime unfriendly to the US government, and this hasn't happened.

Although external funding can assist a movement, it is better to be self-financed. This makes a movement less vulnerable to influence from actors with different agendas, and alignment is better: "the money is the message."

Dealing with attack

Protesters often come under attack: they may be slandered, harassed, beaten, arrested, imprisoned, even killed. Their communications may be intercepted, their offices raided and their equipment confiscated or destroyed. These attacks are hurtful and expensive, damaging to morale and can discourage participation. But with the right preparation and tactics, and good luck, some attacks can be made to backfire on the attackers.⁸ It's not easy and doesn't happen often but it can be very powerful.

Perpetrators and their supporters regularly use five methods to inhibit outrage from their attacks:

- cover up the attack
- devalue the target
- reinterpret what happened (including lying, minimising effects and blaming others)
- use official channels to give an appearance of justice
- intimidate and bribe targets and their supporters.

For example, after police assault protesters, the police and their supporters may use every one of these five methods.

- Police, in assaulting protesters, often try to do it away from witnesses and cameras.
- Police, politicians and commentators denigrate protesters as being unprincipled, foul-mouthed, ill-behaved brats, rent-a-crowd (professional protesters), thugs, scum, criminals or terrorists.
- They claim that police were doing their duty, that protesters were violent and disturbing the peace and indeed that it was the police who came under attack.
- When protesters make formal complaints or go to court, seldom are

January–March 2008

there any serious consequences for abusive police. Meanwhile, the whole process takes so long that most people lose interest while activists are tied up in technicalities and distracted from activism.

- In many cases protesters don't speak out for fear of police reprisals; in a court action they may accept a settlement to resolve the matter, often with a silencing clause attached.

Each of the five methods can be challenged.

1. Expose attacks

Solid, reputable, vivid documentation can powerfully expose injustices, overcoming attempts at cover-up.

On 12 November 1991, Indonesian troops opened fire on protesters in a funeral march in Dili, the capital of Indonesian-occupied East Timor. Previous massacres had been hidden from the world, but the Dili massacre was witnessed by western journalists, photographed and videotaped. This documentation led to a huge increase in international support for East Timor's independence. The massacre completely backfired on the Indonesian government.

In 2004, digital photos were published showing US guards torturing and abusing Iraqis held in Abu Ghraib prison. This documentation led to a large backlash against the US occupation of Iraq.

In planning a protest, activists should imagine ways they might be attacked, and plan to expose them. Will police beat protesters with batons? Then have lots of cameras ready to record the beatings. Will police try to confiscate the cameras? Then have observers at a distance with telephoto lenses. Will police use rubber bullets? Then collect some and show the media they are steel bullets with a thin rubber cover. Will police use pepper spray, which doesn't look so bad but can be incredibly painful? Then have medical experts ready to testify about the effects. Present evidence of the attack to the media if they don't have journalists present themselves. Are the mass media likely to record and report police abuses? If not, be ready to post stories and pictures on independent media. Modern equipment can record and send pictures and sound online in real time to a server elsewhere in town. Posters on public places, leaflets at workplaces, and small notes glued to supermarket items also can be effective.

Being prepared to expose attacks is a powerful deterrent to being attacked in the first place. And this effect will grow every time you have been successful in distributing reliable documents on police violence and other forms of attacks.

At the demonstrations at the large summits in recent years, small groups have tried to protect themselves against police brutality by

wearing large helmets, layers of polyester, car tyres and a variety of sports equipment to protect against blows from batons and sticks. Such a strategy can reduce pain but will also reduce the backfire effect — if protesters look like they're ready for violence, then violence against them won't seem so shocking. This is a dilemma for those who want to participate but don't want to be hurt.

2. Validate the target

The attackers are likely to try to devalue the protesters, before, during or after an event.

The September 11 attacks provided an opportunity to devalue protesters of all kinds. Authorities in the US and elsewhere introduced the expression "low level terrorism," verbally associating civil society actors with the common image of brutal, violent, aggressive, dangerous and fanatical terrorists. In Russia, President Putin introduced laws aiming at controlling the civil society. His argument is that opponents are "anti-nationalists." He frequently applies the term "terrorist activities" to critics of his war in Chechnya.

Devaluation can be challenged by sending a positive image through behaviour and appearance, by providing information about backgrounds, beliefs and commitments, and by having valued allies. For example, war veterans, because they have demonstrated their patriotism, are especially credible in opposing wars such as in Vietnam or Iraq. Relatives of victims of the 9/11 attacks are especially credible opponents of the war on terror.

If protesters are well dressed, polite and cheerful, this sends a strong message countering claims they are scruffy, abusive and negative. If protesters circulate information about their commitment to social justice and their involvement in worthy causes, this helps counter claims that they are mindless rebels. If prominent and respected individuals — such as church leaders, lawyers and artists — speak out in support of protesters, this counters claims that they are worthless and unrepresentative.

In the 1986 people-power revolution against Philippines dictator Ferdinand Marcos, hundreds of thousands of people joined protests in the capital Manila. At the front of the protest, facing troops, were Catholic nuns. The nuns could not easily be perceived as radicals or subversives. Their presence deterred troops from attacking the crowd.

A similar effect can be achieved by having famous people leading a demonstration. Pop stars, sports heroes, prominent politicians, religious leaders, and other famous individuals will help to validate the demonstration. Imagine the Pope and top level imams from Sunni and Shia communities standing hand in hand with Nelson Mandela,

subcommandante Marcos, the Dalai Lama and Paul McCartney. Who would use and justify teargas against them?

Another strategy is to dress like a clown, Santa Claus or Mickey Mouse. Few would like to see Santa beaten, so if the police are brutal they will damage their own reputation.

3. Interpret the attacks as unjust

The attackers are likely to claim that their actions are justified, that any negative consequences were not very great, and that someone else was responsible for the abuses. Protesters need to be ready with good arguments that highlight the injustice involved and assign responsibility with precision.

Arguments need to be combined with documentation of the whole process. Having reliable and trustworthy witnesses is a good option.

If police say only a few protesters received minor injuries, a statement by doctors or photographs can support a different interpretation. If police say they were following procedures, an extract from their manual juxtaposed with testimony or photos showing something different can be powerful. If government officials blame a few rogue police for assaults, then leaked documents about government planning may expose this to be false.

4. Mobilise support and avoid official channels.

Complaint procedures, commissions of inquiry, courts and other official channels can soak up an enormous amount of time, money and energy with little positive outcome. They are oriented to technicalities rather than social justice. They privilege the role of experts, for example lawyers, at the expense of popular participation. Rather than being tempted to gain justice through such channels, it's usually better to mobilise support through publicity and campaigning.

Instead of going to court, it can be better to go to the "court of public opinion" by writing articles, posting blogs, producing films and giving talks, and using these to encourage more involvement and carry out new actions.

Sometimes official channels can't be avoided, or can be turned against the attackers. When McDonald's sued activists in the anarchist group London Greenpeace over the leaflet "What's wrong with McDonald's?", two of those targeted, Helen Steel and Dave Morris, decided to resist. They mounted a legal defence. Although Steel and Morris lost in court on some points, McDonald's suffered massive damage to its image due to the public campaign by supporters of Steel and Morris, including circulation of information, rallies, pickets, and a website (www.mcspotlight.org).

In 1983, a small pacifist journal in Norway was accused of espionage for publishing a series of articles on secret US military installations. Membership files, documents and a lot of irrelevant information were taken in a police raid against the editorial office and the activists' private homes. Years of trials followed, with the editors eventually found not guilty by a three-to-two vote in the Supreme Court. However, the activists involved did not rely on the court for justice: the main impact came as a result of popular indignation, most of it due to people opposing the methods police used against the journal: this was the first police raid against the media in Norway since Quisling was prime minister during the Nazi occupation, 1941-1945.

On a more routine basis, official channels can undermine movements by encouraging some activists to join the system — called co-option — leaving others isolated as outsiders who are dismissed as too radical and who become more vulnerable to attack. Working inside the system can sometimes be effective but it can dampen movement momentum.

5. Resistance

Attackers use intimidation and bribery to discourage expression of outrage. Not everyone is able to resist. But if some people can resist, such as the courageous protesters in East Timor and the Philippines, this sends a powerful message, encouraging others.

Resistance can occur in even the most repressive situations and contexts, including in prison, concentration camps and the most brutal and oppressive regimes. James C. Scott has documented everyday resistance among peasants and slaves.⁹

In East Germany, for decades after 1945, opposition to the government had been curtailed through extensive surveillance, penalties for critics and rewards for supporters. In 1989, with the end of Soviet protection and the opening of an exit route to the west, there were some small rallies. Within a matter of weeks, the rallies became larger: visible resistance encouraged more participation. Before long, the regime collapsed.¹⁰

Conclusion

In deciding on what, when and how to protest, it's useful to think of audiences and messages.

Audiences

How do audiences and activist methods interact? Opponents, third parties and activists themselves are important audiences.

January–March 2008

Alignment

How do activist methods align with activist goals? If there is close alignment, it's more likely the right message will be received.

Attacks

How will an attack be perceived? It's vital to be prepared to counter the methods of cover-up, devaluation, reinterpretation, official channels, intimidation and bribery.

Postscript: documentation, evaluation and dissemination

For actions to become more effective, activists need to learn from past experiences. They need to document and evaluate what they are doing and make this information available for others. Just as students at war colleges learn about historical battles from lectures and textbooks, activists must build a similar system for coming generations to learn from the history of social movements. This requires serious, critical evaluations of planning, actions and outcomes. It is just as important to study mistakes as to celebrate victories. Then these evaluations must be made available for other activists, taking into account different languages and contexts. It is a large task. There are many actions from which to learn!

Acknowledgements

We thank Max Abrahms, Sharon Callaghan, John Jones, Mattias Linder, Radhu Pandya, Alex Plows and Wendy Varney for valuable comments on a draft and John Moolakkattu for helpful editorial suggestions.

Notes and References

1. See Genetix Snowball, *Handbook for action: a guide to safely removing genetically modified plants from release sites in Britain* (Manchester: Genetix Snowball, 1998), available at <http://www.fraw.org.uk/gs/>
2. The following framework is taken from Brian Martin and Wendy Varney, "Nonviolence and communication," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 40, No. 2, March 2003, pp. 213-232.
3. Arista Maria Cirtautas, *The Polish Solidarity movement: revolution, democracy and natural rights* (London: Routledge, 1997); Jan Kubik, *The power of symbols against the symbols of power: the rise of Solidarity and the fall of state socialism in Poland* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).
4. See Johan Galtung, "Principles of nonviolent action: the great

- chain of nonviolence hypothesis," in *Nonviolence and Israel/Palestine* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Institute for Peace, 1989), pp. 13-33.
5. Tor Sellström, *Sweden and national liberation in Southern Africa. Volume II: solidarity and assistance 1970-1994* (Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute, 1999).
 6. Sean Scalmer, *Dissent events: protest, the media and the political gimmick in Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2002).
 7. Correspondent inference theory is applied to international relations by Max Abrahms, "Why terrorism does not work," *International Security*, Vol. 31, No. 2, Fall 2006, pp. 42-78.
 8. See "Backfire materials" at <http://www.uow.edu.au/arts/sts/bmartin/pubs/backfire.html>.
 9. James C. Scott (1985) *Weapons of the weak: everyday forms of peasant resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985); *Domination and the arts of resistance: hidden transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).
 10. Roland Bleiker, *Nonviolent struggle and the revolution in East Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Albert Einstein Institution, 1993); Jonathan Grix, *The role of the masses in the collapse of the GDR* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 2000); Karl-Dieter Opp, Peter Voss and Christiane Gern, *Origins of a spontaneous revolution: East Germany, 1989* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

JØRGEN JOHANSEN is a peace activist, organiser, educator and writer, with experience over many years in many countries. He is the author of numerous books and articles. He is affiliated with Transcend Peace University. Email: jorgen.johansen@ikkevold.no

BRIAN MARTIN is professor of social sciences at the University of Wollongong, Australia. He is the author of many books and articles on nonviolence and other topics. Email: bmartin@uow.edu.au

January–March 2008

Special 25% Discount for the Readers

**GANDHI
MARG**

Quarterly Journal of the
GANDHI PEACE FOUNDATION

VOLUME TWENTY-NINE □ NUMBER TWO □ JULY-SEPTEMBER 2007

Articles

Kuruvilla Pandikattu: Discourse as the Interlocutor for Participative Development: Amartya Sen and Paul Ricoeur on Freedom that Enables • K. Gireesan, Jos Chathukulam: Total Sanitation Campaign and Nirmal Gram Puraskar: An Overview of Four Indian States • Upasana Pandey: The Problem with Postmodern Gandhi • Sudhir Kumar: Poetry as Satyagraha: A Gandhian Reading of Les Murray's "Walking to the Cattle Place"

Notes and Comments

Ramananda Choudhury: Gandhi's View of Politics • Arvind Sharma: Mahatma Gandhi as a Thinker • K.D. Gangrade: Gandhian Perspective on Global Interdependence, Peace and Role of Professional Social Work

Tribute

Gautam Varma: Varmaji: A Tribute (18 April 1925 to 9 October 2006)

Book Reviews

Joy Elamon: T.M. Joseph ed., Local Governance in India: Ideas, Challenges and Strategies • S.P. Udayakumar: Siby K. Joseph, ed., Explorations in Culture of Peace • Dr. Ravi P. Bhatia: Anthony Parel, Gandhi's Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony

House News

Published by:

GANDHI PEACE FOUNDATION

221 & 223 Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Marg, New Delhi-110 002

Phones: +91-11-23237491/93, Fax: +91-11-23236734

E-mail: gpf18@rediffmail.com, gandhipeacefoundation18@yahoo.co.in