

Introduction

Justice and power must be brought together, so that whatever is just may be powerful, and whatever is powerful may be just.

—Pascal

The Stories

ONE FRIDAY NIGHT in December 1981, Lech Walesa and other leaders of Solidarity were arrested after a meeting in Gdansk. For sixteen months, their free trade union movement had shaken the foundation of communist power in Poland by occupying factories and staging strikes. Now martial law had been imposed, and Solidarity was looking down a gun barrel at defeat. But when he was taken away, Walesa challenged his captors. "At this moment, you lost," he told them. "We are arrested, but you have driven a nail into your communist coffin . . . You'll come back to us on your knees."¹

If only violence is power, and if repression has no answer, then Walesa's words were foolish. But he knew that Solidarity had already defined the course of the conflict, by stripping the regime of the Polish people's consent. When the state had run out of ways to coerce their compliance, it would have to come to terms. Seven years later General Wojciech Jaruzelski, who had jailed Walesa, invited him and other Solidarity leaders to join round-

table talks that led to elections and the formation of a new government. In 1990 Walesa, a shipyard electrician only ten years before, became president of Poland. He had never fired a shot, nor had anyone in Solidarity. But together they threw back the shroud of authoritarian power and gave freedom to every Pole.

In the century's last decade, Walesa joined the ranks of many other heads of state who gathered each September in New York to attend the opening of the United Nations General Assembly. The great majority of these men and women were democratically elected presidents and prime ministers. Had such a meeting been held one hundred years before, all but a few would have been kings, emperors, generals, or other rulers who had reached power by violent force or dynastic inheritance. This was the most important political change that the twentieth century wrought, but it would not have come to pass without the actions of ordinary people who defied oppressive rulers through nonviolent power rather than by force of arms. How that power was developed and applied is the subject of this book.

This is a tale of ten decades, of popular movements battling entrenched regimes or military forces with weapons very different from guns and bullets. In each of these conflicts, disruptive actions were used as *sanctions*, as aggressive measures to constrain or punish opponents and to win concessions. Protests such as petitions, parades, walkouts, and demonstrations were used to rouse public support for movements. Forms of noncooperation such as strikes, boycotts, resignations, and civil disobedience helped subvert the operations of governments. And direct intervention such as sit-ins, nonviolent sabotage, and blockades frustrated many rulers' will to subjugate their peoples.²

The historical results were massive: Tyrants were toppled, governments were overthrown, occupying armies were impeded, and political systems that withheld human rights were shattered. Entire societies were transformed, suddenly or gradually, by people using nonviolent resistance to destroy their opponents' ability to steer events. How this happened and the ideas lying at the root of nonviolent action are at the heart of this book and the companion documentary television series that we helped produce.

It all started in Russia. Eighty-six years before Boris Yeltsin stood on a tank in Moscow in 1991, shouting scorn for a coup attempt, Russians marched to the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg to present petitions to the Tsar. In between those moments unfolded a tumultuous, worldwide march toward a fresh understanding of power: that real power derives from the consent of those it would control, not from the threat of violence against them. The emergence of this concept, in the great struggles against dictatorship, invasion, and the

denial of human rights, is represented in the decisions of extraordinary individuals and their victories and failures:

- In 1905 an Orthodox priest, Georgii Gapon, persuaded 150,000 workers to walk the icy streets of Russia's ancient capital in the century's first public challenge to autocratic power. He ignited mass action nationwide that led to the country's first popularly elected national parliament.
- After the world war that opened the door to the Bolshevik takeover in Russia and imposed reparations on Germany, miners and railway workers in the Ruhr in 1923 confronted invading French and Belgian soldiers who were sent to extract German resources. They refused to cooperate and thwarted the invaders' goals until the British and Americans pressed for the troops' withdrawal.
- In 1930-1931 Mohandas Gandhi led mass civil disobedience against the British in India. He convinced his followers to stop paying salt taxes and cease buying cloth and liquor monopolized by the raj, intensifying his nation's long, successful drive to independence.
- Danish citizens during the German occupation in World War II refused to aid the Nazi war effort and brought their cities to a standstill in the summer of 1944, forcing the Germans to end curfews and blockades; other European peoples under Nazi domination resisted nonviolently as well.
- Salvadoran students, doctors, and merchants, fed up with the fear and brutality visited on their country by a longtime military dictator, organized a civic strike in 1944. Without picking up a single gun, they detached the general from his closest supporters, including members of the military, and forced him into exile.
- Less than ten years after the British left India, a Baptist preacher from Georgia, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., following Gandhi's teachings, led his fellow African Americans on a fifteen-year campaign of marches and boycotts to overthrow racial segregation in the American South.
- A few years after Dr. King was assassinated, Polish dissidents defied communist rule by initiating new forms of social action rarely seen in the Soviet bloc. Later workers struck and won the right to organize, giving rise to Solidarity and eventually the end of communism.
- As change was brewing in Poland, a group of Argentine mothers, outraged by their government's silence about the disappearance of their sons, started marching in the central plaza of Buenos Aires. They did not stop until the legitimacy of the country's military junta was undermined, leading to its downfall after the debacle of the Falklands War.

- As the generals fell in Argentina, General Augusto Pinochet, across the Andes in Chile, faced a surging popular movement that mounted a series of protests of his dictatorship. Ultimately they overturned him through a plebiscite he was not supposed to lose.
- Half a world away, after Ferdinand Marcos stole an election in the Philippines in 1986, the widow of an assassinated opposition leader led hundreds of thousands into the streets. Supporting a rebellion by reform-minded military officers, they deprived the dictator of any chance to hold power by force, and he fled the country.
- Not long after Filipinos reclaimed their democracy, Palestinians challenged Israeli military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza by organizing protests and boycotts and by building their own network of social services. This wave of nonviolent resistance became the largest if least visible part of the *intifada*.
- While Solidarity continued its fight, boycott organizers, trade unions, and religious leaders in South Africa joined to wage a nonviolent campaign against apartheid. Along with international sanctions, they helped force the freeing of Nelson Mandela and negotiations for a democratic future.
- Days after the Berlin Wall fell, thousands of Czech students sat down at the edge of Wenceslas Square in Prague chanting, "We have no weapons . . . The world is watching." In weeks the communist regime and others like it in East Germany, Hungary, Bulgaria, and even Mongolia were gone.
- In the 1990s a Burmese mother, Aung San Suu Kyi, led her country's democracy movement while under house arrest, as young Burmese were bolstered in their struggle by a new worldwide cohort of nonviolent activists and practitioners.
- In 1999-2000, a student-led resistance movement, with support from pro-democratic groups abroad, and a unified political opposition mobilized to defeat President Slobodan Milosevic at the polls. With his security forces neutralized by a nonviolent uprising, and facing a general strike, Europe's last dictator capitulated.

The potential for victory without violence was present in all these conflicts, and the interplay among each story's vivid characters determined whether it was realized. From a German steel baron to a Chilean photographer, from Leo Tolstoy to Desmond Tutu, and from a Danish king to a Tennessee mayor: They, and dozens more with whom these stories are studded, all played a part. It is, after all, the words and works of individuals that we recount: the passion of those who sparked or led the campaigns; the arrogance, guile, and eventual disgrace of the autocrats they overcame; and the native genius, foolish blunders, and stunning sacrifice seen throughout the century's cavalcade of "people power."

In 1936 Mohandas Gandhi was visited by a well-known African American minister and his wife, who asked him at one point whether nonviolent resistance was "a form of direct action." Gandhi replied vigorously, "It is not one form, it is the only form . . . It is the greatest and the activist force in the world . . . It is a force which is more positive than electricity, and more powerful than even ether." It was as if he conceived of it, not as the product of beliefs, but as a kind of science with laws to be applied, yielding power that was predictable.³

It is often assumed that the choice of nonviolent resistance is made for moral reasons, but the historical record suggests otherwise. Most who used nonviolent action in the twentieth century did so because military or physical force was not a viable option. Some simply lacked sufficient arms to mount a violent revolt; others had recently seen a violent insurrection fail, with devastating results for life and property. But since people's most vital interests were at stake, and because they were determined to take down the rulers or laws that withheld their rights, they were impelled to take up other, nonviolent weapons. Those who used nonviolent action in our stories did not come to make peace. They came to fight.

The Conflicts

Before, during, and after the great ocean-spanning wars of the last century, a series of other conflicts took place, not between nations but within them, and not about conquest or ideology but about self-determination, freedom from domination by one party or racial group, and democracy. These conflicts have been overshadowed in the news and entertainment media and thus in our collective memory by wars, genocide, carpet bombing, and terror. But the nonviolent sanctions used in the stories we tell may be far more pertinent to the strategy and tactics of conflicts in the twenty-first century than were battles in the trenches against the German kaiser, naval showdowns in the Pacific, or guerrilla fighting in the jungles of Indochina.

This book is not a comprehensive history of all the century's clashes in which nonviolent action played a part. Instead each of the stories is emblematic of how nonviolent sanctions can be the cutting edge of a strategy to undermine and displace a seemingly intractable opponent. And through all these conflicts can be traced the century-long progression of ideas about nonviolent power and practice. The first three parts of the book are organized to show how nonviolent action was used in three major types of conflict.

Part I, Movement to Power, tells how nonviolent sanctions were pivotal in three of the century's great nation-changing popular movements for self-rule: the campaigns against imperial dynasty in turn-of-the-century Russia, against British colonial command of India, and against the Soviet-style system in Poland.

Part II, Resistance to Terror, shows how civilian resisters confronted military occupiers or rulers in midcentury, when state violence reached a crescendo. It tells how Germans hindered the invading French and Belgians in the 1920s, how Danes and other Europeans under German occupation subverted the Nazis during World War II, and how the Salvadoran people ousted General Martínez in 1944. And it traces how Argentines and Chileans weakened rulers who also wore uniforms and terrorized their people, in the 1970s and 1980s.

Part III, Campaigns for Rights, charts how, in the second half of the century, nonviolent sanctions were used against a variety of governments to obtain specific rights: how the American civil rights movement opened the fist of segregation in the American South, how the black majority in South Africa upended apartheid, how Filipinos ejected a dictator and restored democracy, how the Palestinians confronted Israeli control of the Occupied Territories, and how popular forces in China, Eastern Europe, and Mongolia contested the one-party regimes in their countries.

Part IV, Violence and Power, examines two reverse cases, in which movements that opted for violent insurrection or terror often spawned far more social chaos and political losses than they reaped power. It also explores how advanced technology, international sanctions, and other changing conditions may empower or limit those who use nonviolent power in the twenty-first century.

Along the spine of each story is a series of engagements between those who use nonviolent action and their adversaries. Some of our stories are about slow-building movements that display great momentum and dexterity in the use of nonviolent power but forsake short-term gains for long-term dreams. Other stories are about rapidly organized campaigns headed by brilliant amateurs who seem to triumph quickly against all odds. But in all cases, it is the strategy inherent in each side's choice of sanctions that decides its fate.

The continuity represented by these stories was not visible only at the century's end. The leaders who drove events often learned from earlier experience. Gandhi was inspired by what happened in Russia in 1905. African American leaders traveled to India to study Gandhi's tactics. When Chileans organized against the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet in the 1980s, and Filipinos organized against Ferdinand Marcos, they were influenced by Richard Attenborough's motion picture *Gandhi*.

Gandhi confronted the British raj, an adversary quite different from the German Wehrmacht faced by the Danes. Civil rights leaders in America had the law and U.S. Constitution on their side, an advantage not available to Solidarity in Poland. Yet all the nonviolent protagonists in these conflicts adopted

remarkably similar approaches to secure different objectives, and their experience yields lessons that flout the conventional wisdom:

- The use of nonviolent sanctions has been far more frequent and widespread than usually supposed. They were crucial elements of history-making struggles in every part of the world and in every decade of the century.
- Nonviolent action has worked against all types of oppressive opponents—and there is no correlation between the degree of violence used against nonviolent resisters and the likelihood of their eventual success. Some who faced the greatest brutality prevailed decisively.
- A nonviolent movement's potential for success degenerates when it tries to incorporate violence into its strategy. Once a regime is attacked with deadly force, its ability to rally internal support and apply repression is enhanced.
- Mobilizing and maintaining a popular movement geared to nonviolent action go hand in hand with strengthening a civil society and establishing or sustaining democracy.

Notwithstanding these realities, the popular mind has persistently held onto two misconceptions of nonviolent conflict. First, since the century's two most celebrated leaders of nonviolent movements—Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.—emerged from religious callings, nonviolent action has been stereotyped as a moral preference rather than a pragmatic choice, thereby obscuring its strategic value in conflicts. Second, since the fall of Marcos in 1986, news coverage of mass nonviolent action has left the impression that “people power” comes from the size or energy of crowds who agitate in city streets. While physically confronting an opponent can be necessary, the true rhythm of effective nonviolent action is less spontaneous than it is intentional, less theatrical than technical. It has little to do with shouting slogans and putting flowers in gun barrels. It has everything to do with separating governments from their means of control.

Many predict that the twenty-first century will feature a procession of fierce but parochial conflicts, in which irredentists try to seize old lands, ethnic partisans strive for independence, or aggrieved minorities seek a place at the table. Yet any provincial interest usually is voiced as the desire for rights. The great democracies believe that if power is predicated on self-government, rights can be freely petitioned. If assuring democracy is always the answer, what should have greater priority, freezing in place the parties to a conflict or promoting ways to engage in conflict so that it is more likely to yield a democratic outcome?

In a world in which vital human interests are in constant competition, conflicts will occur, and violence will be used in conflicts as long as people believe

it will help them win. If another, more effective way to succeed, without the costs of violence, were more widely appreciated, violence would begin to seem less sensible as the way to fight for a cause. Most policymakers have been enamored of either arms reduction or conflict resolution as the primary methods of reducing deadly violence, assuming that all conflicts are prone to be violent. But in each of more than a dozen major conflicts in the twentieth century between two sides vying for control of a nation's destiny, strategic nonviolent action rather than violence was the decisive mode of engagement. Since violence can be supplanted as the means of conflict, the goal of curtailing violence need not always be encumbered by the separate task of resolving a conflict's cause.

"Capable of Wielding Great Power"

This book is an account of how the people of the twentieth century developed the ability to take power without using violence. Each of our stories focuses on the use of nonviolent action in a larger conflict. To show what nonviolent power accomplished, we have necessarily chosen to highlight certain events and individuals more important for our stories than they were for the full histories of their time or place. But we have not consciously understated the impact of other people or episodes that were significant in a broader historical context. We do not, for example, presume to give a complete history of how apartheid fell in South Africa. We do venture to provide a fair and instructive report of how nonviolent action was used to help make that happen.

All works of history are influenced by the perspectives of their writers, and ours is no exception. In parts I, II, and III we have tried to let the facts speak for themselves and to reserve most of our analytical thoughts for the concluding section of each chapter. The book's final part represents a blend of expository material and interpretive ideas about the larger questions raised by the way that nonviolent action has transformed the world. We make no apology for having a point of view: Nonviolent sanctions, if used effectively, can end oppression and liberate nations and peoples, and they can do so with less risk and more certainty than resorting to violent revolt or terror. But they have not always worked, and this book does not avoid mention of those moments when they are relevant to our stories.

We also believe that nonviolent resistance deserves more attention than it has generally received. In our time violence generates more news because, for many, history is perceived as a spectacle. But if it were understood more commonly as a process, then the dynamic effect of nonviolent sanctions would be more easily appreciated. This form of power is not arcane; it operates on the same level of reality that most people live their lives, and it is comprehen-

sible for that reason. Contrary to cynical belief, the history of nonviolent action is not a succession of desperate idealists, occasional martyrs, and a few charismatic emancipators. The real story is about common citizens who are drawn into great causes, which are built from the ground up. It is about people staying home from work or occupying their factories and offices, refusing to carry identity papers, printing newsletters in their basements, and not leaving when they are told to go.

Indians who broke the British salt monopoly, Danes who obstructed Nazi military shipments, Chileans who organized against dictatorship: Many who used nonviolent action instinctively recognized that power derived from what *they* did, not only from what was done by those who sat in palaces or presidential mansions. In the words of the great theoretician of nonviolent power, Gene Sharp, "Nonviolent action is possible, and is capable of wielding great power even against ruthless rulers and military regimes, because it attacks the most vulnerable characteristic of all hierarchical institutions and governments: dependence on the governed."⁴

At the end of the last century, the world's airwaves and bookstores were full of material that looked back at what was called the most destructive hundred years in history. In reel after reel, and on page after page, we were shown the carnage, the awful cost, it was said, of defeating evil. But told only that way, the history of the century's conflicts would reinforce a terrible fallacy: that only violence can overcome violence, that the struggles with the highest stakes have to be settled by force of arms. Yet if that were true, how was it possible that in the same century, rulers and oppressors having every conceivable advantage in violent force were pushed aside on every continent by people who did *not* resort to violence?

The greatest misconception about conflict is that violence is always the ultimate form of power, that no other method of advancing a just cause or defeating injustice can surpass it. But Russians, Indians, Poles, Danes, Salvadorans, African Americans, Chileans, South Africans, and many others have proven that one side's choices in a conflict are not foreclosed by the other side's use of violence, that other, nonviolent measures can be a force more powerful. If the great sacrifice of lives and honor exacted by the last century is required in the next one hundred years, it will be because that truth becomes more fully understood.