nonviolent action

WHAT CHRISTIAN ETHICS DEMANDS 
BUT MOST CHRISTIANS 
HAVE NEVER REALLY TRIED

RONALD J. SIDER

Foreword by Richard J. Mouw

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Ronald J. Sider, Nonviolent Action
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To all the courageous pioneers who have demonstrated that nonviolent action works
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There was a time when, as a defender of Just War theory, I got into heated arguments with pacifists. I still argue about the differences between us, but not with the same degree of passion as in the past. I owe the decreased intensity in my feelings on the subject to what I learned from the late Mennonite ethicist John Howard Yoder, who convinced me that the real divide concerning the use of violence was not between pacifists and Just War defenders. Both of those viewpoints, Yoder pointed out, insist that it is extremely important to subject questions about the legitimacy of violence to strict moral examination. Their disagreement is about whether that kind of examination ever permits the use of military violence. Together, though, these two perspectives stand in radical opposition to those for whom “winning at any cost” is the supreme concern, as well as to the views of the defenders of a pragmatic “national interest” approach.

Yoder obviously would have been pleased if those of us in the Just War camp were to convert to pacifism. But short of achieving that goal, he pushed us to be very strict and consistent in how we employed the criteria for giving moral approval to specific military ventures. In response to those urgings, I came to see that if we are genuinely rigorous in our adherence to Just War doctrine, we would approve of far fewer military campaigns than our past record has shown.

Take Just War teaching’s “proportionality” criterion: the military means that we employ should be proportionate to the overall goals we are attempting to achieve. If your teenager locks himself in his bedroom, one way to get him to open the door is to set the house on fire. But that would obviously be a case where the proposed means are disproportionate to the intended result.
What should be clear to all of us these days is that participating in warfare causes serious psychic damage to those who engage in combat. Broken marriages, post-traumatic stress, nightmares, guilt and shame, suicides—this has become the stuff of daily news reports about the experiences of American veterans returning from combat duty. Military campaigns cause much devastation to large populations around the world. But they also have a serious impact on the soul of a nation that sponsors those campaigns—often, if not always, significantly out of “proportion” to intended goals.

In any event, pacifists and Just War defenders have a lot of work to do together. We need to find sensible and feasible alternatives to the use of military violence. We need to cultivate together what the Greeks called *phronesis*, practical wisdom. Or, to put it in New Testament terms, we need to seek together the gift of *discernment*.

Ron Sider has always been a gifted Christian discerner. While he has never been reluctant to argue for his basic pacifist perspective, that has never kept him from working hard to bring us together for common action on the convictions that we share as persons who profess a deep desire to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ.

This marvelous book is an excellent exercise in Christian *phronesis*. It provides us with many exemplary stories of moral courage. And when those accounts are about Ron’s own participation, he offers candid testimonies about the hopes and fears that have accompanied his activism. But there are some highly instructive historical examples as well, with some clear evidence that nonviolent strategies have had surprisingly positive results in difficult situations.

Ron Sider has much to teach us about moral courage. But he also makes it clear that sometimes we need to wed our moral sensitivities to political and economic savvy. This wise, balanced, and inspiring book is a richly instructive guide for all who have pledged their allegiance to the Savior who is also the Prince of Peace.

Richard J. Mouw,
professor of Faith and Public Life and former president of Fuller Theological Seminary

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I could not have completed this book—at least not in any reasonable amount of time—without the help of a number of gifted graduate students at Palmer Seminary at Eastern University, where I teach. Lori Baynard, Heather Biscoe, David Fuller, Rebecca Hall, Stefanie Israel, Rachel Lesher, and Howard Pinder served (in their capacity as Sider Scholars) as helpful assistants, doing research on different chapters. In addition, David Fuller typed and retyped successive versions, becoming expert at deciphering my handwriting. To each of them I offer my special thanks.

I also want to thank Bob Hosack, my editor and friend at Baker, for his help and wisdom over many years. He has been an important part of making my long partnership with Baker Publishing Group a very satisfying experience.
There are only two invincible forces in the twentieth century—the atom bomb and nonviolence.

Bishop Leonidas Pranao

What good would it do for three kayaks, three canoes, and a rubber dinghy to paddle into the path of a Pakistani steamship? For a tiny fishing boat with unarmed, praying Americans aboard to sail toward an American battleship threatening Nicaragua? For an eighty-year-old woman in a wheelchair to stop in front of advancing Filipino tanks? Or for nonviolent protesters to defy the Communist rulers of the Soviet Empire? Soviet Communism collapsed. The tanks stopped, and a nonviolent revolution succeeded. The American battleship left, and the threat of invasion faded. And the US shipment of arms to Pakistan stopped.

Those are just a few of the many dramatic successes of nonviolent confrontation in the last several decades. Everyone, of course, knows how Mahatma Gandhi’s nonviolent revolution defeated the British Empire and how Martin Luther King Jr.’s peaceful civil rights crusade changed American history. There have been scores upon scores of instances of nonviolent victories over dictatorship and oppression in the past one hundred years. In fact, Dr. Gene Sharp, the foremost scholar of nonviolence today, has said that the twentieth century saw a remarkable expansion of the substitution of nonviolent struggle for

violence. More recent scholarship has not only confirmed Sharp’s comment but also shown that nonviolent revolutions against injustice and dictatorship are actually more successful than violent campaigns.

Surely these facts suggest a crucial area of urgent exploration in the twenty-first century. The twentieth century was the bloodiest in human history. No one who lived through or studies that vicious century needs to be reminded of the horror of war and violence. A violent sword killed more than two hundred million people in the twentieth century alone. One scholar estimates that eighty-six million people died in wars fought between 1900 and 1989. That means two thousand five hundred people every day, one hundred people every hour, for ninety years. Genocide and mass murder by governments killed approximately one hundred twenty million more. The mushroom cloud reminds us of greater agony yet to come unless we find alternative ways to resolve international conflict. A method that destroys more than two hundred million people in one century and threatens to wipe out far more is hardly a model of success. For all of us, from the ordinary layperson to the most highly placed military general, it is obvious that the search for peaceful alternatives is a practical necessity.

It is also a moral demand. Christians in the Just War tradition (a majority since the fourth century) have always argued that killing must be a last resort. All realistic alternatives must be tried before one resorts to war. After a century in which Gandhi, King, and a host of others demonstrated that nonviolent action works, how can Christians in the Just War tradition claim that the violence they justify is truly a last resort until they have invested billions and trained tens of thousands of people in a powerful, sustained testing of the possibilities of nonviolent alternatives?

Pacifists have long claimed that there is an alternative to violence. How can their words have integrity unless they are ready to risk death in a massive nonviolent confrontation with the bullies and tyrants who swagger through human history?

In short, the concrete victories of modern nonviolent campaigns, the spiraling dangers of lethal weapons, and the moral demands of Christian faith bring into focus a clear imperative. It is time for the Christian church—indeed, all people of faith—to explore, in a more sustained and sophisticated way than ever before in human history, what can be done nonviolently.

This does not mean that one must be a pacifist to engage in serious exploration of the possibilities of nonviolence. One can conclude reluctantly that we still must possess nuclear weapons and at the same time fervently desire to substitute nonviolent strategies for violent ones wherever possible. This book does not deal with the old debate between pacifists and Just War theorists—precisely because that debate need not be settled for both to join together in a new, sustained testing of the possibilities of nonviolence.

More and more top Christian leaders, denominations, and councils are calling for a vast new exploration of what can be accomplished through nonviolent action. The National Association of Evangelicals in the USA, Pope John Paul II, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA), the World Council of Churches, and the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity have urged this expanded investigation.\(^6\)

The purpose of this book is to promote that exploration. Parts I–III tell some of the most dramatic stories of successful nonviolent resistance to injustice, oppression, and dictatorship. Part IV pleads for action—now.

But first, a brief word on terminology. Nonviolence is not passive nonresistance; nor is coercion always violent. Nonlethal coercion (as in a boycott or peaceful march) that respects the integrity and personhood of the “opponent” is not immoral or violent.\(^7\) By “nonviolent action,” I mean an activist confrontation with evil that respects the personhood even of the “enemy” and therefore seeks both to end the oppression and to reconcile the oppressor through nonviolent methods.

“Nonviolent action” refers to a vast variety of methods or strategies. It includes things from verbal and symbolic persuasion through social, economic,
The introduction to the book is dedicated to recognized nonviolent strategies and political noncooperation (including boycotts and strikes) to even more confrontational intervention. Gene Sharp describes 198 different tactics in his classic analysis of nonviolent action. This book does not focus exclusively on any one strategy. Concrete situations demand a unique mix of tactics. We turn now to stories of heroic struggle and astounding success.

Kenneth Boulding’s “first law” is simple: “What exists is possible.”

From before the time of Christ to the present, hundreds of successful instances of nonviolent action have occurred. Recounting these stories demonstrates that nonviolent action works.

In Part I, I briefly review a few of the earlier nonviolent campaigns; next I explore more carefully how Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. drew global attention to the power of nonviolent action; then I show how daring people applied the developing tactics of nonviolent action in Nicaragua and the Philippines.

Passive resistance can be so organized as to become more troublesome than armed rebellion.

_The Times of London, 1861_

The full story of unarmed daring has yet to be written. Here I do not try to fill that gap, for that would require a vast library rather than a short chapter. Instead, I briefly sketch some of the early, and largely unknown, instances of successful nonviolent action.

Perhaps the earliest recorded example of nonviolent resistance occurred in Egypt about three thousand five hundred years ago. The Pharaoh ordered the execution of all Hebrew baby boys. In response, the Hebrew midwives chose civil disobedience, refusing to obey the ruler’s command.


2. Exodus 1:15–2:10. Zunes, Kurtz, and Asher suggest that this incident may be the earliest recorded instance of nonviolent action (Nonviolent Social Movements, 3).
Two Examples from the First Century

In AD 26, Pontius Pilate, the new Roman governor of Judea, outraged the Jews by bringing into Jerusalem military standards emblazoned with the emperor’s image. Since the military standards with Caesar’s image violated Jewish teaching, the religious leaders begged Pilate to remove the ensigns from the holy city. What happened is best told by the first-century Jewish historian Josephus:

Hastening after Pilate to Caesarea, the Jews implored him to remove the standards from Jerusalem and to uphold the laws of their ancestors. When Pilate refused, they fell prostrate around his house and for five whole days and nights remained motionless in that position. On the ensuing day Pilate took his tribunal in the great stadium, and summoning the multitude, with apparent intention of answering them, gave the arranged signal to his armed soldiers to surround the Jews. Finding themselves in a ring of troops, three deep, the Jews were struck dumb at this unexpected sight. Pilate, after threatening to cut them down, if they refused to admit Caesar’s images, signaled to the soldiers to draw their swords. Thereupon the Jews, as by concerted action, flung themselves in a body on the ground, extended their necks, and exclaimed that they were ready rather to die than to transgress the law. Overcome with astonishment at such intense religious zeal, Pilate gave orders for the immediate removal of the standards from Jerusalem. 3

Nonviolent intervention worked.

A few years later, the Jews won an even more striking nonviolent victory. Caligula was the first Roman emperor to require that his subjects worship him as a god during his lifetime. In AD 39, Caligula sent Petronius to Jerusalem with three legions of soldiers to install his statue in the temple in Jerusalem. Outraged, the Jews organized a primitive version of a nationwide strike. Refusing to plant crops, tens of thousands of Jews took part in a “sit-in” in front of the residence of Petronius, the Roman legate. For forty days they protested nonviolently. Jewish leaders summoned for private persuasion remained firmly united with their people. They would all rather die, they insisted, than permit such a desecration of their temple.

This courage and commitment so impressed Petronius that he decided to risk his life and ask the emperor to change his mind. Caligula was furious.

sent a messenger commanding Petronius to commit suicide. Very soon after dispatching this messenger, however, Caligula himself was murdered. Fortunately, strong winds delayed the emperor’s messenger, who arrived with the fatal letter twenty-seven days after Petronius had learned that Caligula was dead.\textsuperscript{4} Nonviolent direct action had succeeded again.

\section*{Attila and the Pope}

In the middle of the fifth century, the conquering Attila marched to the very gates of the Eternal City. Having swept through central and eastern Europe in a bloody campaign, Attila hungered for the ultimate prize, Rome. His reputation preceded him. Terrified Romans believed that “the grass never grew on the spot where his horse had trod.”\textsuperscript{5} Facing this powerful warrior stood a demoralized Roman army and a daring Roman bishop.

Some stories portray Pope Leo I riding a mule, leading a small group toward Attila’s advancing army. Armed only with a crucifix and a papal crown, the brave Leo directs his men in song as they advance. Finally, they face the enemy— their backs to the Roman wall, their exposed fronts to the “barbarians.” Now the incredible happens. Attila, alarmed and confused, turns tail and runs— never to be seen again!\textsuperscript{6} Nonviolent peacekeeping at its pristine best? Perhaps, although many of the details likely are legendary.

But modern historians do believe that Leo the Great, accompanied by a Roman senator and other official ambassadors, did confront the invading Hun. Whether the negotiators were unarmed, singing, and riding mules is open to doubt. What is certain is the success of the mission. According to Edward Gibbon, in his classic work on the Roman Empire, “The pressing eloquence of Leo, his majestic aspect and sacerdotal robes, excited the veneration of Attila for the Spiritual father of the Christians.”\textsuperscript{7} The two parties managed to hammer out an acceptable treaty. The invading army withdrew.\textsuperscript{8} Leo the Great’s

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{4} This story is told in Josephus, \textit{Jewish Antiquities} 18.257–309; \textit{Jewish War} 2.184–203.
\bibitem{8} Attila was discovered dead in his bed soon after this incident. He had expired during one of his many honeymoon celebrations.
\end{thebibliography}
willingness to intervene directly and face a brutal warrior with overwhelming military might probably saved Rome from destruction.

**Neglected History**

Over the intervening centuries, there were undoubtedly examples of nonviolent action. Unfortunately, that history has attracted fewer historians than have the bloody battles of the Charlemagnes and Napoleons. But one should not assume from the relative silence of the history books that these centuries were free from any form of nonviolent resistance.

The American Revolution offers a striking illustration of this historical oversight. Almost every American knows about General George Washington and his military victories in the War of Independence. Only a very few realize how successful nonviolent resistance to British tyranny had been even before a shot had been fired. But scholarly study has demonstrated that by 1775 nine of the American colonies had already won de facto independence by nonviolent means.⁹

The nonviolent struggle in Hungary in the latter part of the nineteenth century is another exciting, yet relatively unknown, chapter in the emerging history of nonviolent action. Between 1850 and 1867, Hungarians resisted Austrian imperialism nonviolently and eventually succeeded without violence after armed revolt had failed miserably. In 1849, Austria crushed a popular, violent Hungarian rebellion against Austrian domination. The next year, however, a prominent lawyer, Ferenc Deák, led the whole country into nonviolent resistance. Church leaders disobeyed Austrian orders. People refused to pay Austrian taxes, boycotted Austrian goods, and ostracized Austrian troops. So successful was the nonviolent resistance that *The Times* of London declared in an editorial on August 24, 1861, “Passive resistance can be so organized as to become more troublesome than armed rebellion.”¹⁰ In 1866 and 1867, Austria agreed to reopen the Hungarian parliament and restore the constitution.¹¹

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Far away in the Andes Mountains, another nonviolent victory occurred in the nineteenth century. In his book *Warriors of Peace*, Lanza del Vasto describes the incident in this way:

When relations between Argentina and Chile deteriorated, the two armies marched toward each other through the high passes in the Andes. But on each side, a bishop went ahead of the troops. The bishops met and exchanged the kiss of peace in the sight of the soldiers. And instead of fighting, they sealed a pact of alliance and perpetual friendship between the two nations. A statue of Christ, His hand raised in blessing, stands on the mountain to commemorate this victimless victory.  

By courageously placing themselves between two opposing armies, these peacekeeping bishops doubtless averted bloodshed.

A Growing Vision

Dr. Gene Sharp, longtime researcher at Harvard University’s Center for International Affairs and founder of the Albert Einstein Institute, has pointed out that the twentieth century witnessed an astonishing increase in the use of nonviolence. Some of the key figures are household names around the world: America’s Martin Luther King Jr., India’s Mahatma Gandhi, Poland’s Lech Walesa, the Philippines’ Cory Aquino. Many more are less familiar. But all have contributed significantly to a growing awareness of nonviolent alternatives.

A Brazilian soldier, Colonel Rondon, is one of the less well-known heroes. By the early 1900s, the Chavante tribe was violently resisting its Brazilian oppressors. The hatred and brutality were mutual. But Colonel (later General) Cândido Rondon, an officer in Brazil’s army, determined to deal with the Chavante people in a radically new, nonviolent way. Rejecting the “Shoot the Indians on sight!” policy of the past, Rondon instructed his men, “Die if you must, but never kill an Indian.”

Success did not come overnight. Members of Rondon’s peacekeeping force were wounded, some of them severely. Yet the “Indian Protective Service”

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organized by Rondon lived up to its name. Finally, in 1946, the Brazilian government signed a treaty with the Chavante people. Rondon’s protective service had taken no Chavante lives since its founding some forty years earlier. The treaty permitted the construction of a communication system through the Chavantes’ jungle home, over which Rondon telegraphed a friend, “This is a victory of patience, suffering and love.”

While Rondon experimented with peacekeeping in the field, philosophers expounded it in the public forum. In 1910, the renowned philosopher William James published “The Moral Equivalent of War.” In this article he proposed the conscription of young people for a war against “nature” and for social welfare. James had little time for idealistic visions; he suggested,

Pacifists ought to enter more deeply into the aesthetical and ethical point of view of their opponents. So long as antimilitarists propose no substitute for war’s disciplinary function, no moral equivalent of war . . . so long they fail to realize the full inwardness of the situation. And as a rule they do fail. The duties, penalties, and sanctions pictured in the utopias they paint are all too weak and tame to touch the military-minded.

To be sure, James was not advocating a new “peace army.” He simply saw his plan as having tremendous social value. Yet many today view James’s essay as the antecedent of the idea of the modern peacekeeping force.

Developments between the Two Great Wars

Not only in India (see chap. 2) but in other parts of the world as well, nonviolence was discussed and tested in the 1920s and 1930s.

In 1920, the Germans used nonviolence successfully to defeat a coup d’état. On March 13, 1920, right-wing troops seized Berlin, the capital of Germany, and declared a new government. Spontaneously, tens of thousands of Berliners began a strike. The next day, a ringing call for a general strike echoed throughout Germany:

15. Walker, World Peace Guard, 65.
The strongest resistance is required. No enterprise must work as long as the military dictatorship reigns. Therefore, stop working! Strike! Strangle the reactionary clique! Fight by all means to uphold the Republic. Put all mutual discords aside. There is only one way to prevent Wilhelm II from returning: The whole economy must be paralyzed! No hand must move! No proletarian must help the military dictatorship. The total general strike must be carried through.20

Even though some workers were shot, almost everyone went on strike. The bureaucracy refused to run the government. Within four days, the leader (Wolfgang Kapp) fled to Sweden, and the rebellion collapsed. Even though the police and army had failed to resist the coup, even though the coup succeeded and the rebels seized the machinery of government, they were unable to govern. Why? Because the people would not obey. Massive nonviolent resistance had defeated armed soldiers.21

In the 1930s, James’s idea of action that would be the moral equivalent of war took one small step toward reality. When Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931, the League of Nations demonstrated its weakness by doing almost nothing. Even when the Chinese launched a total boycott of Japanese goods and Japan responded with brutal repression, the League of Nations failed to respond. At this juncture an amazing letter appeared in the London Daily Express. Signed by three well-known church people, the letter urged, “Men and women who believe it to be their duty should volunteer to place themselves unarmed between the combatants [in China]. . . . We have written the League of Nations offering ourselves for service in such a Peace Army.”22 The League of Nations secretary, General Eric Drummond, responded quickly, noting that the organization’s constitution prohibited consideration of “private” proposals. At the same time, however, he promised to circulate the idea among the press in Geneva.23 Editorials mushroomed worldwide. “The suggestion that such an army might suitably interpose itself between the forces of two peoples at war is both intelligent and apt,” remarked the British newspaper The Guardian.24 Across the ocean, Time magazine scoffed at foolish “Occi-

dentals willing to go to Shanghai and heroically interpose themselves between the fighting Orientals.  

Back in Britain, however, the proposal gained support. General Frank Percy Crozier, a decorated veteran of the Western Front, volunteered almost immediately. Approximately eight hundred others followed, forming an organization called the Peace Army. This army, unfortunately, existed mostly on paper and never actually served in Shanghai. Still, a precedent had been set. The proposal for a peace army had drawn marked attention, and fire, from around the world.

**Battling Hitler Nonviolently**

Brave appeals for a nonviolent peace army did not, however, prevent the planet from slipping into the deadliest world war in human history. But even in those years, indeed precisely in many of the countries under the brutal thumb of Adolf Hitler, nonviolent resistance took place, and often it succeeded.

Hitler easily conquered Norway and established Vidkun Quisling as his puppet in 1940. But when Quisling tried to establish fascist institutions, massive nonviolent civil disobedience erupted. Teachers risked their lives, refusing to teach fascist propaganda. Labor unions struck and sabotaged machinery, even though their leaders were imprisoned and killed. Almost all the Lutheran clergy resigned from the state church, which Quisling tried to control. When the Gestapo demanded that the Catholic archbishop withdraw his signature from a letter supporting the defiant Lutheran clergy, he replied, “You can take my head, but not my signature.” Quisling failed in his attempt to impose fascism through the schools and church. Norwegians succeeded in saving more than half of the country’s Jews.

25. Quoted in ibid.  
26. A general turned pacifist, Crozier greatly admired Gandhi and saw the Peace Army as an outgrowth of Gandhian principles.  
28. See Ackerman and DuVall, Force More Powerful, chap. 5; Sharp, Waging Nonviolent Struggle, chaps. 9–10.  
Resistance was even more successful in this regard in Denmark, Finland, and Bulgaria. A secret tip-off concerning the impending arrest of Danish Jews enabled the Danes to hide and then smuggle 93 percent of the Danish Jews to neutral Sweden. Although allied with Germany, Finland refused to deport its Jews, even when Hitler’s chief of security police threatened to cut off Finland’s food supply. “We would rather perish together with the Jews,” Finland’s foreign minister told the astonished Heinrich Himmler.

Also a German ally, Bulgaria initially passed anti-Jewish legislation. But massive resistance to anti-Jewish measures emerged at every level of society, from peasant to priest. The metropolitan of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church hid the chief rabbi in his home. Another Orthodox bishop told the Bulgarian king that he would lead a massive campaign of civil disobedience against deportation, “including personally lying down on the railroad tracks before the deportation trains.” Not one of the fifty thousand Bulgarian Jews fell into Hitler’s hands.

Overthrowing Dictators

Nonviolence toppled two dictators in Central America in 1944.

General Maximiliano Martínez seized power in El Salvador in 1931. The next year, he savagely crushed a peasant revolt, killing thousands. For thirteen years, the tyrannical autocrat ruled. In early 1944, he put down a revolt, torturing some and killing others. In response, university students spread the idea of a nonviolent general strike. Within two weeks, doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers, shopkeepers, and railway workers left their posts. The economy ground to a halt. After a short period, Martínez resigned and fled to Guatemala, where he explained his resignation:

In the first few days of April, I defeated the seditionaries with arms, but recently they provoked a strike. Then I no longer wanted to fight. Against whom was I

31. For the sources, see Sider and Taylor, Nuclear Holocaust, 242–46.
34. For the story, see Patricia Parkman, “Insurrection without Arms: The General Strike in El Salvador, 1944” (PhD diss., Temple University, 1980); Ackerman and DuVall, Force More Powerful, chap. 6.
going to fire? Against children and against youths . . . ? Women also were enlisted in the movement and in this way I no longer had an objective at which to fire.35

General Jorge Ubico had ruled Guatemala with an iron fist since 1931. Unfortunately for him, when El Salvador’s dictator fled to Guatemala in May 1944, he brought along a contagious example of nonviolent resistance. The widespread opposition to Ubico’s tyranny took heart. First students, then schoolteachers went on strike. When cavalry charged a silent procession of women and killed a schoolteacher, a total strike occurred in the capital, Guatemala City. Workers stopped. Businesses and offices closed. The streets were deserted. On July 1, 1944, Ubico gave up.36

Nor are the victories in El Salvador and Guatemala isolated examples. Nonviolent general strikes have overthrown at least seven Latin American dictators in the twentieth century.37 When ruthless military dictators “disappeared” as many as thirty thousand people in Argentina in the 1970s, a movement of mothers (Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo) dared to protest and march in peaceful demonstrations that eventually contributed to the collapse of the dictatorship.38

A Canoe Blockade of American Ports

On July 14, 1971, three kayaks, three canoes, and a rubber raft blocked the path of a huge Pakistan freighter steaming in to load arms at the port of Baltimore.39 The next day, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the US House of Representatives voted to withhold all military and economic aid from Pakistan. A dramatic form of nonviolent intervention had played its part.

The Bengalis of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) had chafed under the domination of West Pakistan. In December 1970, the Awami League, which championed greater autonomy for East Pakistan, won a clear electoral victory. In response, the

Pakistani dictator unleashed his army on East Pakistan on March 25, 1971. By the time the war ended, a million Bengalis had been killed, twenty-five thousand women had been raped, and nine million refugees had fled to India.\footnote{Ibid., xiii.}

As the Pakistani army continued to rampage through Bengal, the US government denied that it was aiding Pakistan. But it was. The United States was shipping large amounts of war material to Pakistan from American ports on the East Coast.

In \textit{Blockade}, an exciting book that reads like a first-rate novel, Richard Taylor describes the daring adventure of the “nonviolent fleet” that helped stop this flow of arms. Taylor and other Philadelphia Quakers decided to dramatize the US shipment of arms by paddling their canoes in front of the steamship \textit{Padma} as it came into the Baltimore harbor to load arms for Pakistan. Obviously, their lives were at risk. As it turned out, they were plucked out of the water by the US Coast Guard, which then escorted the \textit{Padma} to dock. But the news coverage of their action contributed to the vote by the House Foreign Affairs Committee the next day. And the next week, the blockaders flew to Miami and persuaded the longshoremen there not to load any more arms destined for Pakistan.

The action then moved to Philadelphia. More canoes blockaded another Pakistani ship, the \textit{Al Ahmadi}, as the longshoremen watched. The blockaders’ daring persuaded the dockworkers to refuse to load the ship, thus shutting the port of Philadelphia to all Pakistani ships, regardless of their cargo.

Finally, in early November, the Nixon administration ended all shipment of arms to Pakistan. Obviously, many factors led to that decision. But the activity of the “nonviolent fleet” clearly played a part.

This chapter has skipped quickly over a long history of daring experimentation with alternatives to war. We explored only a few of the stories of nonviolent resistance.

We could have looked at John Adams’s insistence, after his extremely dangerous nonviolent struggle to contain the fighting at Wounded Knee (1973), that “at times a person has to fight for nonviolence.”\footnote{John P. Adams, \textit{At the Heart of the Whirlwind} (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 119.} We could have examined the Alagamar Land Struggle in Brazil (late 1970s) and Archbishop Dom Helder Camara’s chasing of the landlord’s cattle off the peasants’ fields.\footnote{See Hildegard Goss-Mayr, “Alagamar: Nonviolent Land Struggle,” \textit{IFOR Report}, July 1980, 15–16.}

\footnote{Ronald J. Sider, \textit{Nonviolent Action} (Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2015. Used by permission.)}
might have noted the massacre that never occurred in Rio de Janeiro in 1968 because “a dozen priests offered themselves as the first victims.” We could have explored the Philadelphia Quakers’ nonviolent police force at the Black Panthers Convention in 1970. And we could have reviewed the overthrow of the Shah of Iran in 1978–79 by overwhelmingly nonviolent methods after violent revolution had failed earlier in the decade.

Even this brief historical sketch demonstrates beyond dispute not only that nonviolent direct action exists but also that it often succeeds. That is an irrefutable part of the historical record. The many stories in subsequent chapters will underline that fact in powerful ways.

