



2 - the evolution of passive resistance

Chapter 2: The Evolution of Passive Resistance

from Michael Randle, *Civil Resistance* (Fontana), 1994

There is nothing new under the sun. In 494 BC the Roman plebeians, aggrieved at their status and condition of life, withdrew to a hill above the city and refused to play their part in civic affairs until their grievances were met.¹ Centuries later, around the year A.D.1600 women of the Iroquois Indian nation refused to have intercourse with their warrior husbands, and thus to bear them warrior sons, until they obtained the right to decide on whether or not the nation should go to war.² This echoed, albeit unconsciously, an idea put forward by the classical Greek dramatist Aristophanes in his play *Lysistrata*.

Numerous other examples can be cited to show that the use of non-cooperation as a means of applying pressure against individuals and groups is not peculiar to any period or civilisation. This is hardly surprising. Most of the tasks essential to keeping a society functioning require cooperation. In egalitarian tribal societies without a central system of authority, the withdrawal of that cooperation is one of the most drastic sanctions used to deter or punish offenders, and maintain social cohesion.³ In post-tribal societies, with divergent socio-political and interest groups, non-cooperation becomes an effective means of promoting the claims of one group against another or against central authority. Finally, once societies or states have developed a marked degree of interdependence, non-cooperation in the shape of trade embargoes and the like become an obvious means of applying pressure short of war, or as a prelude or accompaniment to it.

The most direct antecedent of 20th century civil resistance is the collective organisation and action which emerged in Europe and North America from the late 18th century onwards - and also to some extent in countries whose economies and social structures were drastically altered by the impact of colonial and imperial expansion. Sometime in the early 19th century - or possibly as far back as the American colonists' agitation prior to the outbreak of the War of Independence - the term 'passive resistance' was coined to denote this innovative form of struggle.⁵ A second antecedent, reaching much further back into history, and contributing indeed to the 18th and 19th century phenomenon of collective non-cooperation, is the tradition of individual dissent and disobedience.

* * *

The flourishing of collective political action in general in Europe in the 19th century, and of forms of passive resistance in particular, was due largely to the spread of industrial capitalism and to various social and political developments attendant upon it. Urbanisation and the rise of the factory system enhanced the possibilities of people acting in concert for the achievement of social and political goals. So too did increasing literacy, though this was still at a very low level throughout most of Europe until late in the century. At the same time, dislocation, impoverishment and exploitation made concerted action more necessary as far as the artisan and labouring classes were concerned. In Britain, which led the industrial revolution, self-organisation among these classes had by the late 18th century produced embryo political movements (for instance in the shape of the Corresponding Societies) and embryo trade unions (often disguised as Benefit Clubs and Friendly Societies to evade repressive laws). In Europe as a whole, it had produced by the mid to late 19th century powerful trade unions, and socialist, marxist, anarchist and other radical movements and parties.

Industrial capitalism had also produced a new articulate manufacturing and professional class who demanded a say in the running of government. This emerging 'middle-class', often in alliance with a more numerous artisan and working-class or peasantry, championed the demand for liberal constitutional reform and the broadening of the electorate. Sometimes the result was violent revolution, notably in much of Europe in the period between the French Revolution of 1789 and the wave of revolutions that swept across the continent in 1848. But improved methods of organisation and mobilisation also opened up possibilities for mass non-cooperation and civil



disobedience. Thus, in Britain, agitation under mainly middle class leadership pressurised the government into passing the Reform Act of 1832. Although the Act excluded the working class from the electorate, it both provoked, and helped lay the groundwork for, an upsurge of working class radicalism in the shape of the Chartist movement with its demands for universal suffrage, its mass demonstrations, and its threat of a general strike to enforce its demands. In other European countries, too, even a limited extension of electoral politics served to establish the demonstration, the petition, the public gathering as accepted features of the political culture, and facilitated more radical forms of mass action for social and political goals.⁶

The 18th and 19th centuries also saw both the consolidation of the modern bureaucratic state, and the rise of nationalist struggles. Nationalism was sometimes stimulated when the middle class found its political aspirations thwarted by existing dynastic or imperial arrangements. Thus nationalist struggles tended to overlap with liberal constitutionalist struggles aimed at broadening the franchise and ending absolutist forms of government. Both were spearheaded by the middle class, though with the support of other classes with different priorities and a more radical agenda.

Civil resistance, then, in the sense of organised collective non-cooperation, evolved from the late 18th century onwards in the course of various emancipatory struggles: for workers' rights; for national liberation; for liberal constitutionalism; or for revolutionary social and political goals. It was nourished by an older tradition of conscientious dissent and disobedience which has continued to maintain a life of its own down to the present time. I include in the latter the tradition of pacifism which expressed itself chiefly in the refusal to bear arms or to pay taxes for military purposes. Gandhian non-violence in the present century can be seen as an attempted fusion of these strands in European resistance culture coupled with traditions of non-violence and cultural and social resistance in India and elsewhere. The focus in this book on the European and North American antecedents of civil resistance prior to the present century stems in part from my belief that these were of seminal importance, in part from my own limited knowledge of other traditions.

It is necessary to sound a caveat here concerning the moral and political thrust of passive/civil resistance. It has been crucial certainly to many emancipatory struggles, but on occasions it simultaneously helped to establish or consolidate the domination of a particular class or linguistic group. Thus there were often chauvinistic and even racist overtones in much 19th century linguistic nationalism. Moreover, the assertion of the political aspirations of one group within a particular territory might be at the expense of another at a time when national boundaries in Europe were still in the process of being defined. For example the Hungarian passive resistance against Austria in the mid-19th century, while clearly an emancipatory struggle in so far as it was directed against Austrian absolutism, also consolidated Magyar domination over the Slav and Romanian population who predominated in part of the territory.⁷ Struggles for liberal reforms, too, helped to establish and consolidate middle-class hegemony, though, as noted above, they also facilitated organisation and agitation for radical change.

It is important to make this observation to avoid the pitfall of assuming that a struggle conducted without violence must necessarily be for a just cause, or that, even when it is, there will be no moral ambiguities about any ensuing victory. Collective struggle without violence can produce domination as well as liberation. It may be a useful and necessary exercise to evaluate civil resistance purely as a technique of struggle. But when it comes to applying it, the moral and political goals and likely consequences must be the prime consideration in the debate if one is to minimise the risk of multiplying injustice rather than reducing it.

Before considering passive resistance as it emerged in the late 18th and early 19th century, it will be useful to outline briefly the heritage of dissent and resistance which nurtured it.

Disobedience and rebellion: the European heritage

The right, the duty even, to break the law in obedience to conscience is a recurrent theme in the Graeco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions. In the *Antigone* of Sophocles, the heroine defies what she sees as an outrageous and immoral order by King Creon that her brother Polynice's body should remain unburied because he had led a foreign army against his own city-state of Thebes. The drama, in a sense, was played out for real in Roman persecutions of the early Christians who refused to worship the emperor or to serve in the army.

Christians were not the only people to find the commandment to worship the Roman emperor-gods unacceptable. The Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus (A.D. 37-95?) records an occasion during the reign of the emperor Caligula



(A.D. 37-41) in which the Jewish community successfully resisted the Emperor's order that his statue should be erected in the Temple at Jerusalem. 'Many ten thousands of Jews', the historian records, petitioned the Roman governor in Syria charged with enforcing the Emperor's command, and stated their resolve to die rather than to 'permit such things as are forbidden us to be done by the authority of our legislator, and by our forefathers' determination that such prohibitions are instances of virtue.⁸

Within the Christian tradition, the obligation laid upon the individual to disobey laws or commands regarded as sinful was bound up with another which softened its provocative edge - the obligation of obedience to civil authority, enunciated by St Paul in the New Testament. The effect of this double principle was to forbid rebellion even against an unjust state, but to enjoin disobedience at the point at which the state made demands on the individual which conflicted with Christian morality. The distinction was doubtless lost, however, on a Roman governor faced with a whole Christian community refusing to bear arms. Individual acts of disobedience taken by a sufficient number of people united in a common belief have the force of collective action.

In Christian medieval Europe, the Pauline doctrine of civil obedience conflicted with the Germanic feudal tradition which gave barons the right forcibly to remove a king who ruled unjustly. Moreover, insurrection and revolution were common-place in the Italian city states, and the papacy itself, now as much a temporal as a spiritual authority, often encouraged rebellion.

St Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century laid the groundwork for a shift away from the Pauline doctrine. Influenced by Aristotle and other classical philosophers whose writings had reached Europe via Moslem Spain, he propounded a theory of natural law, based on rationality and the common good, against which all man-made laws were to be measured. Unjust laws, Aquinas argued, were, strictly speaking, not laws at all, but acts of violence. If rulers acquired power by violence or corruption, then - unless subsequently legitimised by public consent or superior authority - it was permissible to overthrow them. This was a theory which lent itself to civil disobedience, even to violent rebellion. Later, however, Aquinas backed away from it, fearing no doubt the social consequences of a private right to depose or kill tyrants. While individual disobedience continued to be a Christian duty in circumstances where obedience would mean acting immorally, rebellion aimed at overthrowing an unjust ruler could only be legitimately undertaken, Aquinas argued, by properly constituted authority.⁹

The 14th century English religious reformer and biblical scholar, John Wyclif, went further. 'There is no unconditional and eternal heritage of secular dominion, no human title to possession can secure such; only he who stands in grace is the true lord,' he declared; 'mortal sin disqualifies the sinner from administering God's fief.'¹⁰ In other words the ruler who falls from grace forfeits his claim to authority. John Huss (1373-1415), the Bohemian religious reformer, adopted Wyclif's 'doctrine of lordship', arguing nonetheless that it did not justify violent rebellion. His death at the stake in 1415 triggered the 15-year-long Hussite insurrection, though his ideas and teachings were more accurately reflected in the practice of the pacifist Bohemian Brethren.

The Protestant Reformation of the 16th century broadened the potential for dissent. Not that this was the intention of its most representative figure, Martin Luther, who vehemently upheld the duty of passive obedience to authority, 'whether it act justly or unjustly'. Disobedience, he stated, was 'a greater sin than murder, unchastity, theft and dishonesty.'¹¹ Moreover, the initial impact of the establishment of nationally based Churches was to strengthen the hand of those monarchs who claimed to exercise both spiritual and temporal authority free from papal interference. But as religious dissent proliferated, and dissenters challenged the absolutist claims of national monarchies - as Luther had earlier challenged papal claims - it eventually became apparent that a degree of religious toleration was the alternative to national disunity and perhaps civil war. Toleration came slowly and unevenly, but where it did, it opened up space for dissenters to organise and to propagate their ideas.

Jean Calvin (1509-64), in Geneva, also insisted on the duty to obey the civil authority, though he conceded the possibility of legitimate resistance by 'lesser magistrates' (authorities) to impious government. His co-religionists in Scotland and France, faced with a totally different political situation, took up this sub-theme in Calvin's teaching and placed it in the centre of their own. Knox, in exile and under sentence of death in his own country, boldly asserted that where rulers failed in their duty to uphold morality and true religion the people had not only a right but a duty to resist. The doctrine that men owed a duty of obedience to a king who disobeyed God's laws was blasphemy. 'For it is no less blasphemy to say that God hath commanded kings to be obeyed when they command impiety, than to say that God by his precept is author and maintainer of all iniquity.'¹²

The French Huguenots also faced a strong Catholic monarchy determined to crush them, and it was one of their number, Mornay, who wrote a powerful and influential tract in support of the right to resist - the *Vindiciae contra*



Tyrannos (1579).¹³ It was republished many times in England and elsewhere whenever there was a crisis in the relationship between the Crown and the people.¹⁴ Nevertheless, its spirit was not democratic but aristocratic; as in Aquinas, the right to resist resided not in the private individual but in duly constituted authority. It asserted the rights of towns, provinces, classes against the claims of absolutist royal power. The same position was taken by the spiritual leader of the French Huguenots, Beza, who succeeded Calvin in Geneva.

In addition to these two main branches of Protestantism, other 16th century religious-cum-political movements, such as those of the Anabaptists and Mennonites, went much further in defying the established temporal and spiritual authorities. These two particular movements also advocated a return to the communist and pacifist principles of the early Christians. The 17th century saw a proliferation of such radical sects and movements, particularly during the period of the English civil war which produced the Levellers, Diggers, Quakers, Ranters and others. The Levellers demanded universal suffrage and equality before the law. The Diggers, or True Levellers, sought to establish a commonwealth in which there would be complete equality and all property would be held in common. Their resistance often took the form of what, in today's parlance, would be termed non-violent direct action. Thus the Diggers squatted on common land at Weybridge in Surrey and on various other sites in the country which they proceeded to dig up and cultivate (hence their name). Christopher Hill has shown that they represented only the tip of an iceberg of radical dissent, and that True Levellers were felt to be a particularly dangerous threat because of the number of their supporters and sympathisers within the army ranks.¹⁵

The 17th century philosopher whose writings in defence of the English revolution became a cornerstone in liberal constitutionalist thought was John Locke. He was one of several political thinkers to advance the notion of a 'social contract' between rulers and ruled. Government was essential to provide certain vital benefits for society, such as the impartial judgement of disputes, the power to enforce decisions, and the ability to defend society against outside threats. The king who failed to live up to his responsibilities was in effect reneging on the contract with society and thereby forfeited his legitimacy. In the extreme case he could be resisted and overthrown.

The end of government is the good of mankind; and which is best for mankind, that the people should be always exposed to the boundless will of tyranny, or that the rulers should be sometimes liable to be opposed when they grow exorbitant in the use of their power, and employ it for the destruction, and not the preservation, of the properties of their people?¹⁶

Moreover, for Locke, as much as for Knox or Mornay in the previous century, the right to resist implied the right when necessary to use violence. Locke sarcastically dismisses the notion that force by an opponent could be resisted in any other way, and concludes: 'he therefore that may resist must be allowed to strike'.¹⁷ This did not mean, however, that either Locke, or those in the Whig/constitutionalist tradition following him, were unaware of other ways of applying pressure to achieve political change. On the contrary, recourse to military force was seen as the ultimate sanction to be applied only when other means were unavailing or clearly inappropriate. Steven Huxley has argued that this is why, in the constitutionalist tradition, no sharp conceptual distinction was drawn between violent and non-violent types of resistance.¹⁸

However, a tradition of vigorous resistance which nevertheless excluded a resort to violence on moral and religious grounds flourished during the 17th century amongst the Quakers and other radical sects. The Quakers denounced the abuses of their day in the most forthright terms, combining this with a blunt refusal to comply with laws they regarded as immoral. This posed a direct challenge to authorities, and resulted in hundreds of Quakers and members of other puritan sects being imprisoned. If the Quakers at that time formulated no theory of collective civil disobedience as a means of coercing the authorities, seeing their disobedience, as the early Christians had done, as a matter of individual conscience, they nevertheless evolved through practice an extremely powerful campaigning technique which was responsible for important reforms.

In North America in the 17th century, Quaker defiance of an edict by the colonial government prohibiting public assembly faced the authorities with a choice of making mass arrests or backing down. They chose the latter course. The Quakers waged a similar successful campaign in America against the payment of tithes to the established church.¹⁹ In England, in 1670, William Penn and William Mead put up a spirited defence at the Old Bailey against a charge of causing a riotous assembly for preaching on Sunday in the city of London. They were acquitted by a jury who made legal history by defying the Recorder's direction to find the two men guilty and resisting his efforts to browbeat them by having them 'locked all night without meat, drink, fire or other accommodation...[or] so much as a chamber pot, though desired'.²⁰ A plaque commemorating the courage of the twelve members of the jury is now displayed in the main lobby of the Old Bailey.



The point to stress here is that this Quaker tradition of public action and campaigning, which has continued down to the present time by them and other groups, was genuine resistance. It was different in kind from the non-resistance of the pre-Protestant era and of some of the more quietist sects, such as the Mennonites, whose impulse was to retire altogether from public life. A tradition of conscientious dissent and disobedience, sometimes combined with absolute pacifist principles, continued into the 19th and 20th centuries, inspiring the work of reformers like the anti-slave campaigner, William Lloyd Garrison, and some of the influential advocates of passive resistance, most notably Thoreau and Tolstoy.

Collective non-cooperation - the birth of passive resistance

With non-cooperation, theory largely followed practice. Its potential was discovered as it were piecemeal by trial and error. There was little systematic discussion of it prior to the late 18th century with the publication of William Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*. As noted above, in the 19th century, demonstrations, marches, strikes, sometimes civil disobedience, and other forms of collective action were developed both by radical reform movements and the growing proletariat created by industrial capitalism. Movements for national autonomy or total independence also frequently found that the most effective method of struggle open to them was passive resistance. Finally from around the mid-century onwards, socialist, anarchist, and syndicalist movements frequently placed the general strike at the heart of their strategy to overthrow the capitalist system. It will be convenient, therefore, to review in tandem the development of the theory and practice of collective non-cooperation down to the turn of the present century.

Pre-18th century contributions

There are relevant insights into the power of collective non-cooperation prior to Godwin. Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) noted the vulnerability of rulers in the face of defiance by his agents and the general population during a period of transition from a 'civil principality' to absolute rule:

Principalities usually come to grief when the transition is being made from limited power to absolutism. Princes taking this step rule either directly or through magistrates. In the latter case their position is weaker and more dangerous, because they rely entirely on the will of those citizens who have been put in office. And these, especially in times of adversity, can very easily depose them either by positive action against them or by not obeying them.²¹

Elsewhere Machiavelli warns that the ruler 'who has the public as a whole for his enemy can never make himself secure; and the greater his cruelty, the weaker does his regime become.'²² Nevertheless it seems that Machiavelli expected that the refusal of agents and people to obey orders would be the prelude to conspiracy or violent insurrection rather than that non-cooperation would of itself bring about a tyrant's downfall. His work is mainly directed to advising princes on statecraft, including the judicious use of deceit, repression and military force to retain power. However another 16th century writer/statesman, Etienne de la Boétie (1530-63), does give more serious consideration to non-cooperation as a mode of coercive political action. The theme of his *Discours de la Servitude Volontaire* (literally 'Discourse on Voluntary Servitude') is that the power of tyrants comes from the voluntary cooperation and 'servitude' of the people; if that is withdrawn, the tyrant will be powerless:

Resolve not to obey, and you are free. I do not advise you to shake or overturn him [the tyrant] - forbear only to support him, and you will see him, like a great colossus from which the base is taken away, fall with his own weight and be broken in pieces.²³

But La Boétie makes the mass withdrawal of cooperation sound rather too simple; after all, servitude under tyranny was no more 'voluntary' in Renaissance Italy than it is today. In fact, in an earlier passage in the essay, La Boétie acknowledges: 'It often happens we are obliged to obey by force'. In that case, he says, we ought to 'bear the evil patiently, and reserve ourselves for a future and a better fortune.'²⁴ There is little prospect held out here that non-cooperation could be sustained and brought to a successful conclusion in face of violent repression.



A more important point is that La Boëtie's essay was not part of, and did not give rise to, a debate at the time about the possibilities of non-cooperation.²⁵ It was valued as an indictment of tyranny rather than a novel prescription for overturning it. It was not published until 1574, after La Boëtie's death, and then in plagiarised and incomplete form without acknowledgement of its authorship, and used by French Huguenots, Scottish Calvinists and Dutch Protestants as a propaganda tract against Catholic absolutism. Not until 1727 was it published under La Boëtie's own name and included in a collection of the works of his friend and contemporary, Montaigne. It was first published in English in 1735.²⁶ However, as we shall see, its importance lies not in the influence it had in its own time, but on writers and theorists in the 19th and 20th centuries who rediscovered the work.

Radical and early working-class movements

Godwin's treatment of non-cooperation is altogether more substantial and of its time. The Enquiry Concerning Political Justice was published in 1793 during the period of heated debate in England on the French Revolution. It may well have been intended, like Paine's more famous essay, as a riposte to Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and has become a classic of libertarian/anarchist literature. If obedience is withdrawn, Godwin argues, the fabric upon which unjust government, encroachment on freedom and subjection are built falls to the ground.²⁷ He does not altogether rule out recourse to violent resistance, but sees this as a very last resort, not to be embarked upon without the prospect of success and even then only 'where time can by no means be gained, and the consequences instantly to ensue are unquestionably fatal.'²⁸ A revolution without violence, he maintains would lead to the 'euthanasia of pernicious government'.²⁹

Godwin's book enjoyed immense popularity in the years immediately following its publication, particularly in élite literary circles, but also among the groups of artisans and workers who clubbed together to buy it.³⁰ But by the closing years of the century, things had changed dramatically. Many of the poets and literary figures - Southey, Coleridge, Wordsworth - recanted their earlier radicalism, while repressive legislation, such as the Two Acts of 1795-96 and the Seditious Societies Act of 1799, was used to suppress the Corresponding Societies and other radical and reformist groups.

In the post-Napoleonic war period there was a renewed interest in Godwin's ideas, thanks largely to the work of the poet Shelley - and to the notes by the radical journalist/publisher Richard Carlile in his pirated edition of Shelley's *Queen Mab*.³¹ Godwin's ideas continued to influence the socialist and labour movement through such 19th century reformers as Robert Owen, the utopian socialist, Francis Place, a founder member of the London Correspondence Society in 1792, and William Thompson, the early socialist economist. Godwin's wife, Mary Wollstonecraft, was also an important figure in her own right. Her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, published in 1792 applied Enlightenment ideas to the position of women in society and marked an crucial moment in the long and continuing struggle for women's rights. Her demand for women's suffrage was taken up by the Chartists in the 1830s, but was not fully realised until 1928 after many years of agitation and the major civil resistance and civil disobedience campaigns of the suffragettes in the early years of this century.

Shelley - who eloped with and eventually married Godwin's daughter by Mary Wollstonecraft - adopted Godwin's ideas with enthusiasm, and gave them poetic expression in such works as *Queen Mab*, *The Revolt of Islam* and *Prometheus Unbound*. One poem is particularly interesting in the context of the present discussion. *The Mask of Anarchy* was written in response to the Peterloo Massacre of 1819. This occurred when a large orderly crowd, including many women and children, who had gathered in St Peter's Field, Manchester, to hear the radical orator Henry Hunt, was attacked by yeoman cavalry and hussars. Eleven people were killed and hundreds injured in what became known as the 'Battle of Peterloo' - an ironic reference to Waterloo. The poem combines a scathing polemic against the postwar reaction and tyranny in Britain with an explicit advocacy of nonviolence to overcome it. The polemic is well exemplified in the early stanzas:

I met Murder on the way -
He had a mask like Castlereagh³² -
Very smooth he looked, yet grim;
Seven blood-hounds followed him:
All were fat; and well they might
Be in admirable plight,
For one by one, and two by two
He tossed them human hearts to chew



Which from his wide cloak he drew.

Later Shelley presents his vision of peaceful resistance which would defeat tyranny:

Let a vast assembly be,
And with great solemnity
Declare with measured words that ye
Are, as God has made ye, free -...
And if then the tyrants dare
Let them ride among you there,
Slash, and stab, and maim, and hew,-
What they like, that let them do.

With folded arms and steady eyes,
And little fear, and less surprise,
Look upon them as they slay
Till their rage has died away.

Then they will return with shame
To the place from which they came,
And the blood thus shed will speak
In hot blushes on their cheek.

Every woman in the land
Will point at them as they stand-
They will hardly dare to greet
Their acquaintance in the street.
And the bold, true warriors
Who have hugged Danger in wars
Will turn to those who would be free
Ashamed of such base company...

Rise like Lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number-
Shake your chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you-
Ye are many - they are few.

Taken literally, Shelley's vision may seem removed from reality. As a metaphor for the public revulsion to the Peterloo massacre and its political consequences, it was extraordinarily accurate. For Peterloo, more than any other single event, established the right to public demonstration in 19th century England.³³ Clearly there was by this time a deepening understanding of the possibility of non-cooperation and civil disobedience as a method of resistance and contention. In Britain, for instance, after Peterloo, attempts by the government to gag the press by the infamous 'Six Acts' were countered - with eventual success - by a veritable campaign of defiance in which hundreds of radical journalists, printers and distributors spent terms in prison. Edward Thompson graphically describes the process:

There is perhaps no country in the world in which the contest for the rights of the press was so sharp, so emphatically victorious, and so peculiarly identified with the cause of the artisans and labourers. If Peterloo established (by a paradox of feeling) the right of public demonstration, the rights of a 'free press' were won in a campaign extending over fifteen or more years which has no comparison for its pigheaded, bloody-minded, and indomitable audacity. Carlile (a tinsmith who had nevertheless received a year or two of grammar school education at Ashburton in Devon) rightly saw that the repression of 1819 made the rights of the press the fulcrum of the Radical movement. But, unlike Cobbett and Wooler, who modified their tone to meet the Six Acts in the hope of living to fight another day (and who lost circulation accordingly), Carlile



hoisted the black ensign of unqualified defiance and, like a pirate cock-boat, sailed straight into the middle of the combined fleets of the State and Church. As, in the aftermath of Peterloo, he came up for trial (for publishing the Works of Paine), the entire Radical press saluted his courage, but gave him up for lost. When he finally emerged after years of imprisonment, the combined fleets were scattered beyond the horizon in disarray. He had exhausted the ammunition of the Government, and turned its ex officio informations and special juries into laughing-stocks. He had plainly sunk the private prosecuting societies, the Constitutional Association (or 'Bridge-Street Gang') and the Vice Society, which were supported by the patronage and the subscriptions of the nobility, bishops and Wilberforce.

Carlile did not, of course, achieve this triumph on his own. The first round of the battle was fought in 1817, when there were twenty-six prosecutions for seditious and blasphemous libel and sixteen ex officio informations filed by the law officers of the Crown. The laurels of victory, in that year, went to Wooler and Hone, and to the London juries which refused to convict.³⁴

In the economic and social struggle, too, the strike more and more replaced machine-breaking, rick-burning and similar actions as the chief weapon of the working-class protest and resistance. The timing of this shift in organisation and methods of action varied from one country to another, starting earlier in those countries such as Britain and France where capitalist industrialisation first took root. The significance of this shift is discussed in more detail later.

Nationalist and constitutionalist campaigns

Etymologists have traced the first written use of the term 'passive resistance', and its German equivalent 'passiver Widerstand', to 1819, the year in which Shelley wrote *The Mask of Anarchy*.³⁵ It was applied mainly to constitutionalist and nationalist struggles rather than to those of the working-class and it sometimes denoted peaceful pressure within the law rather than civil disobedience and mass non-cooperation. In 1848, the year of revolution in Europe and 'the birth of nations', the President of the Prussian National Assembly, Hans Victor von Unruh, called publicly for a campaign of passive resistance to oppose the dissolution of the Assembly by the Crown.³⁶

At this period, passive resistance became the centre of heated political debate. Marx, in an article in *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* in December 1848 denounced it as a means used by the bourgeoisie against the revolution.³⁷ His disciple, Ferdinand Lassalle, in a speech in Dusseldorf in 1849, described the passive resistance of the National Assembly as a betrayal; passive resistance was a contradiction, resistance that was no resistance, a product of the bourgeoisie's recognition of the need for resistance coupled with its fear to act accordingly.³⁸ What Marx and Lassalle were attacking, however, was not mass non-cooperation by the population as a whole but the exercise of legal and parliamentary pressure on the authorities by a middle class whom they suspected of wanting to avoid unleashing all-out revolution. Marx waxed sarcastic too about the constitutional pedigree on which the Prussian National Assembly was basing its claims.

Closely related to constitutionalist struggles, and based on an appeal to the same fundamental principles, were 19th century nationalist struggles. Without renouncing violence under all circumstances, the leaders of these struggles increasingly recognised the possibilities of passive resistance. The prototype here was the resistance in the late 18th century in Britain's American colonies in the decade that preceded the outbreak of hostilities in 1775.³⁹ The campaign began with the defiance of the Stamp Act in 1765 - an act which imposed duties on a range of paper goods including legal documents and newsprint. Resistance took the form of petitions, tax refusal, the social boycott of stamp tax agents, the publication of newspapers without payment of the duty, and the non-importation and non-consumption of British goods. Most of the agents resigned as a result of this pressure, and it was already a dead letter by the time of its repeal in March 1776.

The Townshend Acts of 1767, which imposed duties on a wide range of goods, met with similar resistance. The Acts were repealed in 1770, except for the tax on tea. The Tea Act of 1773, designed in part to secure the enforcement of the tax on tea while at the same time strengthening the commercial position of the East India Company, was countered with a campaign to get the tea agents to resign. It also provoked the famous Boston Tea Party in which merchants dumped a cargo of tea in Boston harbour in December 1773.

The British government responded by passing the Coercive Acts. These virtually closed down Boston harbour, granted exceptional powers to the governor of Massachusetts, and gave governors in all states the right to billet soldiers in certain circumstances in unused buildings. The Acts were aimed primarily at punishing the state of



Massachusetts but - as Edmund Burke warned the colonists - they represented a threat to all the colonies. However, beginning in 1773 prior to the Boston Tea Party, the elected assemblies in the various colonies had begun establishing 'correspondence societies' to coordinate their response to British measures, and by the time the Coercive Acts were passed they were ready to mount a united resistance. The First Continental Congress, which took place in September 1774, brought together representatives of all the state assemblies and adopted a detailed programme of non-cooperation known as the Continental Association. In addition to the economic measures, courts were closed, taxes refused, British governors openly defied and extra-legal Provincial Congresses convened to oversee the enforcement of the Association's measures. In April 1775 the first shots of the War of Independence were fired, but as John Adams - who succeeded George Washington as President - wrote in 1815:

A history of military operations from April 19th, 1775 to the 3rd of September, 1783, is not a history of the American Revolution...The revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people, and in the union of the colonies; both of which were substantially effected before hostilities commenced.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, the American War of Independence overshadowed the campaign of non-cooperation that had preceded it. Far more influential as a model of passive resistance for nationalist/constitutionalist goals was that conducted by Hungary against Austria from 1849 to 1867. Its aim was the restoration of the constitution which was suspended by Austria in 1848 and which had recognised Hungary's status as an autonomous kingdom within the Habsburg Empire. Led by a Hungarian landowner and politician, Franz Deák, the resistance took the form mainly of a boycott by Hungarian MPs of the Imperial Parliament in Vienna and non-cooperation by Hungarian county councils in carrying out Austrian policies. But it included also resistance at popular level, including tax refusal, a boycott of government employment and positions, social boycotts of Austrian troops and agents, and a range of symbolic actions, protests and demonstrations. In 1867, the campaign - in conjunction to be sure with other factors, including Austrian weakness after its defeat by the Prussians at the Battle of Sadowa in the previous year - resulted in a compromise agreement which met the essential Hungarian demands.⁴¹

The Hungarian campaign influenced all subsequent passive resistance campaigns in the 19th century for constitutionalist and nationalist goals, and indeed, by way of Gandhi, those in the present century. It was the prototype for the Finnish passive resistance to attempted Russification from 1899 to 1906. This resistance was ignited by a new Russian military law in 1899 increasing the length of military service, drafting Finns into Russian units or placing Russians in charge of Finnish ones. At the same time, the power of the Finnish Diet was reduced to that of a provincial assembly. The Finns refused to implement the law and there was widespread resistance to conscription. In 1903 the constitution was suspended, and in the following year the Russian governor Bobrikov was assassinated. There is evidence that the resistance had begun to lose momentum by this time, but it received unlooked-for assistance in the shape of the 1905 revolution in Russia, and the Empire-wide general strike. The embattled Tsar repealed the conscription law, and in 1906 the Finnish Diet was re-established on a more democratic basis.⁴²

In Ireland, the Hungarian resistance caught the imagination of Arthur Griffith, a founder-member of and key figure in Sinn Féin (founded in 1905). In 1904, in a series of witty, polemical articles in the *United Irishman*, Griffith outlined the course of the Hungarian resistance and advocated a campaign along similar lines in Ireland. Irish parliamentarians, he argued, should boycott the British Parliament and demand the restoration of the constitutional position as of 1782 when Britain had conceded Irish parliamentary independence. The articles were published in a penny-pamphlet form later that year under the title *The Resurrection of Hungary: A Parallel for Ireland*.⁴³ As an historical account it has been severely criticised, one critic likening it to 'a fairy tale'.⁴⁴ In fact it was not so much a fairy tale, more a propaganda tract. As such it was immensely successful, enjoying a wide circulation and being republished in 1912 and again in 1918. (The 1918 edition included a reference to the Finnish resistance as providing another example of a successful campaign.) It was also translated into a number of Indian languages and widely distributed within India.⁴⁵ Gandhi cited the Hungarian campaign and recommended the Transvaal Indians in South Africa to pursue a similar course of action, relying almost certainly on Griffith's account.⁴⁶

But Ireland had its own history of passive resistance, and some critics of Griffith's tract argue that he would have done better to have turned to that rather than trying to force parallels with a Central European country whose politics he only half understood. In the 18th century, the Dean of St Patrick's Cathedral, Jonathan Swift, had recommended his fellow countrymen to 'burn everything English but her coal', and proposed a system of Dual Monarchy in which Ireland's only connection with England would be through the Crown. Daniel O'Connell in the 19th century had brilliantly exploited the organisational possibilities open to him in the (highly restricted) electoral system of the period. His election as member for County Clare in 1828 faced the British government with the choice



of declaring the election void (on the grounds that Catholics were not eligible to become MPs) or to change the law. Fearful of provoking a full-scale insurrection, they chose the latter course, and the Relief Bill was passed the following year. O'Connell's campaign became a model for reformist organisation and agitation in Britain. For instance, Thomas Attwood's Political Union, which spearheaded the campaign for the Reform Act of 1832, was consciously modelled on the Catholic Association.⁴⁷

O'Connell's efforts to secure greater independence for Ireland, however, were unsuccessful. Like Swift, he was prepared to settle for a system of dual monarchy with England. He proposed the setting up of a Council of Three Hundred to act as the de facto government of Ireland, and toyed with the notion of a boycott of parliament. Thomas Davis, another major figure in the Irish national movement in the first half of the 19th century, was also prepared to settle for a dual monarchy. While not renouncing the use of force, he appears to have envisaged active non-cooperation as the principal means of applying political pressure.⁴⁸ In the early 1880s, the National Land League under the leadership of Michael Davitt and Charles Stuart Parnell conducted a vigorous campaign against exorbitant rents and evictions - leading on occasions to violent confrontations despite the efforts of the leadership to avoid this. Rent refusal, and the complete ostracisation of anyone who attempted to farm land from which others had been evicted, formed the core of the struggle. The word 'boycott' was coined in this period following the ostracisation of a certain Captain Boycott, the agent of an absentee English landlord.⁴⁹ The Sinn Fein movement itself produced one major essayist committed on principle to the rejection of violence. This was Robert Lynd (1879-1949), an Ulster-born writer who contributed to the journal *Sinn Fein* and insisted that a nonviolent struggle would maintain the unity of the country and prove more difficult than armed rebellion for the British to suppress.⁵⁰

The 1916 rebellion in Ireland and the subsequent guerrilla war of 1919-21 resulted in the subordination of civil resistance to the military struggle. Nevertheless, many of the specific measures advocated by Griffith were implemented, including most notably the establishment of an Irish National Assembly, *Dail Eireann*, in Dublin in 1919 following Sinn Fein's massive victory at the polls. Moreover, in January and June of the following year, Sinn Fein won similarly impressive victories in the elections to the municipal, county and rural district councils, and by the autumn, on the advice of Dail Eireann, the majority of councils outside north-east Ulster had severed their connections with the existing British-administered Local Government Board. The British system of justice was also largely supplanted by the 'Dail Courts', and by July 1921 there were an estimated 900 such Parish Courts and seventy District Courts in operation.⁵¹ Thus, if Ireland had become largely ungovernable - by Britain - in 1920-21, this was due not only to the armed rebellion but to the establishment of a parallel structure of government, law and administration.

The degree of interaction between the Irish and Indian independence struggles is striking. The influence of Griffith's history of the Hungarian resistance within India has been mentioned. But Griffith for his part took a keen interest in the Indian nationalist movement and exchanged information with several Indian patriotic journals. He regarded the Indian *Swadeshi* movement - which amongst other things propagated a boycott of British manufactures - as the equivalent of *Sinn Fein*. In 1907, the future Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, visited Dublin during a vacation from his Cambridge studies and wrote to his father that *Sinn Fein* was similar to the advanced section of the Indian National Congress.⁵²

Clearly, then, there was a cross-fertilisation of ideas between various movements for national independence from at least the period of the Hungarian struggle onwards, leading to the adoption of passive resistance as an important, if not the central, strategy in independence struggles.

Utopian and revolutionary projects

The notion of a general strike that would overturn the capitalist order was a recurrent one among European radical and revolutionary movements in the 19th century. The Chartists had dreamed of it in the 1830s and 1840s, though never came close to implementing it. Richard Tucker, the American anarchist whose writings were influential in both his own country and Europe, was one of the theorists to place the general strike at the centre of his proposed strategy. Though supporting violence in self-defence, he attacked Lassalle's critique of passive resistance as 'the resistance that did not resist.' On the contrary, Tucker argued, it was the most effective weapon in the hands of the working-class.⁵³ In Italy from around 1900, syndicalism was a growing force in the working-class, and in 1904 Italian workers staged the first more or less successful general strike in history in protest against the killing of workers and peasants in the South and in Sardinia. Georges Sorel, the major theorist of syndicalism, though a passionate



advocate of revolutionary violence, also regarded the general strike as the crucial revolutionary weapon.

The general strike that came closest to realising its revolutionary objective took place across the Russian Empire in 1905. It broke out in January 1905 as a result of the 'Bloody Sunday' massacre of over 100 unarmed demonstrators in St Petersburg and strikes, demonstrations, and sometimes armed clashes paralysed the country for most of that year. In October, the Tsar announced major concessions to the protesters, including the establishment of an elective legislature. The attempt by the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in Moscow to turn the strike into an armed uprising in December 1905 can be seen in retrospect to have been a cardinal blunder, enabling the Tsar to crush the insurrection. Twelve years later, in the February revolution, strikes, mutinies, mass desertions and demonstrations finally brought about the end of Tsarist rule.

The 19th century writer who was more directly in the non-violent tradition and close to individualist anarchism in his political outlook was the American writer Henry David Thoreau. Thoreau engaged in personal civil disobedience by refusing to pay his poll tax to the state of Massachusetts over a period of six years on the grounds that it supported slavery and an unjust war against Mexico. His essay on civil disobedience, first published in 1859 under the title *Resistance to Civil Government*, was occasioned by his arrest and overnight imprisonment for his tax-refusal. (To his annoyance, a friend paid his fine to secure his release.) It was reprinted after his death under the title it is now generally known - *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience*.

Thoreau argues for selective civil disobedience on grounds of principle. He had paid his highway tax because he was 'as desirous of being a good neighbour' as he was 'of being a bad subject'. He withheld paying the poll tax, not because of any particular item in the tax bill, but 'to refuse allegiance to the State, to withdraw and stand aloof from it.'

In defending his action on grounds of conscience, Thoreau is in the mainstream tradition of radical dissent. However, in denying that he owed any allegiance to the American state while it went on behaving as it did, and in refusing to pay taxes to it, he took his defiance further than most. The crucial point, though, is that he propounded the notion that conscientious law-breaking was politically effective - more so than voting, or engaging in propaganda campaigns, or attempting to work through constitutional methods to change the laws.

Cast your whole vote, not a strip of paper merely, but your whole influence. A minority is powerless while it conforms to the majority; it is not even a minority then; but it is irresistible when it clogs by its whole weight. If the alternative is to keep all just men in prison, or give up war and slavery, the State will not hesitate which to choose. If a thousand men were not to pay their tax-bills this year that would not be a violent and bloody measure, as it would be to pay them and enable the State to commit violence and shed innocent blood. That is in fact the definition of a peaceable revolution, if any such is possible. If the tax-gatherer, or any other public officer asks me, as one has done, 'But what shall I do?' my answer is, 'If you really wish to do anything, resign your office.' When the subject has refused allegiance and the officer has resigned his office, then the revolution is accomplished.⁵⁶

In this passage, Thoreau appears to recognize the coercive implications of mass defiance, and resignations by government officials. Yet his appeal is essentially to the individual conscience, and he looks to the moral impact of civil disobedience rather than its coercive potential:

I know this well, that if one thousand, if one hundred, if ten men, whom I could name - if ten *honest* men only - ay if one HONEST man, in this state of Massachusetts, *ceasing to hold slaves*, were actually to withdraw from this copartnership, and be locked up in the county jail therefor, it would be the abolition of slavery in America.

It is possible that Thoreau was familiar with La Boétie's essay on Voluntary Servitude. His close friend, Ralph Waldo Emerson certainly knew of it, and dedicated a poem to its author. However, there is no direct evidence on this matter.

One can easily see why Tolstoy saw in Thoreau a kindred spirit. He praises Thoreau's 'admirable essay' and the example he set in going to prison for refusing to pay taxes to the state.⁵⁷ Tolstoy's entire emphasis is on individuals acting according to conscience, regardless of consequences. The 'golden rule' that one should do to others as one would have them do to oneself, or at least that one should not do to others what one would not have them do to



oneself, was embodied, he believed, in the teachings of all the great sages and inscribed in the human heart. That is why non-Christians who heeded the dictates of conscience would also be led to an uncompromising rejection of violence. However, the principle was most perfectly expressed in the teachings of Christ. 'We must take the Sermon on the Mount', he wrote, 'to be as much a law as the theorem of Pythagoras.'

Tolstoy rejected both Church and State. The one corrupted Christ's teaching, the other was an institution based on murder and exploitation. War, whether defensive or offensive, he denounces as murder and contrary to God's law. Tolstoy is no less opposed to patriotism, which he rejects as an expression of egoism and self-aggrandisement, and as the cause of war. To the argument that the patriotism of an oppressed people should be judged in a different light, he replies that it is even more dangerous since it is rooted in bitterness and more likely to give rise to war. One does not require patriotism, he argues in order to oppose the subjugation and exploitation of people; Christ's teaching already implies this, and if all would follow that teaching such abuses would come to an end. It is ironic in the light of this that Tolstoy should have such a profound effect on one of the 20th century's representative nationalist leaders, M.K. Gandhi.

As one would expect, Tolstoy has no time for the tactic of political assassination pursued by some anarchists at that period. He opposes assassination, however, not only on moral but also on political grounds. 'How,' he asks, 'can an organised body of Anarchists, ...quietly considering means of improving the condition of the people, find nothing better to do than to murder people; the killing of whom is as useful as cutting off one of the Hydra's heads?'⁵⁸ It is not the Czars, emperors or kings, he states, who are the cause of oppression and war, even though they do organise them. 'But it is those who have placed them in, and support them in, a position in which they have power over the life and death of men. Therefore it is not necessary to kill Alexanders and Nicholases...but only to leave off supporting the social condition of which they are the product.'⁵⁸ The passage is reminiscent of La Boétie's argument and may owe something to it as Tolstoy had certainly read *On Voluntary Servitude*.

Tolstoy was not interested in changing political institutions as such. 'Christian doctrine, in its true sense,' he states, 'never proposed to abolish anything, nor to change any human organisation. The very thing which distinguishes Christian religion from all other religions and social doctrines is that it gives men the possibilities of a real and good life, not by means of general laws regulating the lives of all men, but by enlightening each individual man with regard to the sense of his own life.'⁶⁰ Nonetheless, he did believe in the power of public opinion, always provided people would speak the truth as they perceived it. He praised the work of the anti-slavery campaigner, William Lloyd Garrison, citing at length in his essay 'The Kingdom of God is within you' Garrison's proclamation on non-resistance sent to the Society for the Promotion of Peace in 1838.⁶¹ He also had a shrewd notion of how to arouse public opinion, and successfully pleaded the cause of a persecuted Christian pacifist sect in Russia, the Doukabours, writing letters to the foreign press and making statements on their behalf until they were given permission to emigrate en masse to Canada.

Tolstoy also took a keen interest in Gandhi's passive resistance campaign in South Africa and the two exchanged several letters. But Tolstoy's understanding of passive resistance is entirely that of the individual refusing out of personal conviction to engage in war or exploitation, or to pay taxes to a state which is responsible for such things. Gandhi, a keen reader of Tolstoy's moral and political essays, was no less concerned with right action. However, he combined this with a gift for organisation, and an intuitive understanding of the responses of the Indian masses, that made him an outstanding political leader of a kind that Tolstoy neither wished to be nor was capable of being.

Steven Huxley sums up the evolution of passive resistance in the 19th century as follows:

Throughout Europe in the 19th century passive resistance developed into an articulated doctrine and concrete practice of struggle for various groups and classes. For the rising bourgeoisie it was a suitable approach to the defense and achievement of their interests against both the old regime and the masses. For "the masses" it was a mode of struggle against oppression. For nationalists it was a weapon highly compatible with economic development and cultural self-assertion; in other words, it was a way to independence. For socialist and anarchists it was the means of contention most in harmony with their ideals, as well as being the most suitable weapon for their struggle.⁶²

Where are we to place passive resistance in the broader context of emancipatory struggle in 18th and 19th century Europe and North America? The work of Charles Tilly and his co-workers helps us to do this. In *The Rebellious Century: 1833-1933*, they examine the incidence of major collective violence in France, Germany and Italy during this period, and relate it to a changing pattern of collective organisation and action. They draw an important



distinction between *competitive*, *reactive* and *proactive* conflict.⁶³

Competitive conflict is a more common feature of the pre-industrial era. It is rooted in organisation at the communal level and expressed in such things as feuds and brawls between rival villages, competing groups of artisans and the like; soccer violence between rival football supporters would be a present day example. Tilly and his co-authors note that competitive violence declined dramatically with the centralisation of state power in the course of the 19th century, partly because the setting for power struggles moved from the local to the national level.

Reactive conflict arises out of resistance to the claims of the centralising state (allied to an expanding industrial capitalism), and is typified by tax rebellions and riots, violent resistance to conscription, machine-breaking, the occupation of enclosed land, and so forth. Here too the organisational base is at the communal level, and again the incidence of reactive struggle declined as the power of the central state increased and the legitimacy of its claims became more widely accepted.

Proactive conflict is defined by the fact that at least one group is 'making claims for rights, privileges or resources not previously enjoyed'.⁶⁴ It is rooted in associational forms of organisation - more open and bureaucratised than the communal forms, aiming at national or international outreach, and usually with a public programme and distinct ideology. Confrontations with authority tend here to result from relatively brief co-ordinated mass actions and shows of strength such as demonstrations, marches and strikes.

In practice, of course, the distinctions are not always so clear-cut; nor are there distinct periods separating the prevalence of one form of action over another. Clearly, however, the proactive forms of struggle, and associational forms of organisation, are the characteristic modern forms, and they emerged as something new on the social and political scene in Europe in the course of the late 18th and the 19th centuries.

Charles Tilly and his collaborators note, in relation to all three forms, that when violence occurs it does so as a consequence of collective action that is not of itself violent. To quote the authors: 'practically no common forms of collective action which we have encountered are intrinsically violent'.⁶⁵ The bulk of collective violence 'emerges from much larger streams of essentially non-violent collective action', and is then frequently the result of a 'forcible reaction of a second group - often of specialized repressive forces in the employ of governments - to the non-violent collective reaction of the first'.⁶⁶

A further important finding is that the vast majority of instances of collective political action - demonstrations, strikes, tax refusals, resistance to conscription - 'did not end in violence'.⁶⁷

Thus out of 20,000 strikes which took place in France from 1890 through 1914, only 300 to 400 produced any violence beyond the scale of minor pushing and shoving. From 1915 through 1935, the figure is 40 or 50 violent strikes out of 17,000...The violent events did not begin much differently from the non-violent ones; for the most part, the presence or absence of resistance by a second party determined whether violence (in our sense of damage or seizure over resistance) resulted. Many of the Italian land occupations of the 19th century went on peacefully; the violence typically began when landlords, troops, or mafiosi arrived to expel the occupiers from the land.⁶⁸

The criteria which the Tilly group employ do not distinguish between violence on the part of the police or army from that on the part of protesters. Thus a strike or demonstration in which the protesters maintained a completely non-violent discipline would register as an occasion of major political violence if the police or army killed or wounded more than a certain number of people or had inflicted serious damage to property. This is a serious disadvantage when it comes to assessing the relative merits of violent and non-violent action in achieving the desired ends.

However, the Tilly group see no sharp distinction between violence and non-violence. The fundamental strategic choice, they argue, 'is not between violent and non-violent means. It is between different forms of collective action which vary in the probability that they will lead to violence'.⁶⁹ Elsewhere they conclude: 'No tragic chasm separates violence from non-violence, in 1968 or 1768'.⁷⁰

This conclusion is questionable. On pragmatic as much as moral grounds, organisers of mass demonstrations often go to great lengths to ensure that protesters avoid violence, even in the face of attacks by the police, precisely because the chasm between violence and non-violence can be tragic - in human terms and in terms of the effectiveness of the action. The non-violent discipline of protesters in the former GDR and Czechoslovakia in



1989, even in the face of police attacks, was probably crucial to their success. (However, the authors acknowledge that they were 'unable to put together anything like a comprehensive record of such everyday 20th-century forms of collective action as the non-violent demonstration', adding that 'the history and sociology of the demonstration as a distinctive modern form of action remain to be written'.²¹)

Governments have frequently provoked violence among protesters to provide themselves with a cover for using extreme violence on the streets, or introducing draconian laws. The history of 19th century radical and working-class agitation in Britain reveals the lengths to which governments were prepared to go using agents provocateurs to instigate violence during strikes and demonstrations, and even to foment uprisings which they knew were foredoomed to failure. G.D.H. Cole and Raymond Postgate record the activities of the government spy Oliver in 1817 who travelled from town to town posing as a representative of the 'Physical Force Party', urging groups of labourers and artisans to take up arms and assuring them that their district was almost alone in not being ready to take action. In the main he was unsuccessful, but he did persuade a small group of framework knitters in desperate straits to gather whatever arms they could and march towards Nottingham until intercepted by a party of soldiers. Thirty-five of the insurgents were tried for high treason, of whom twenty-three were convicted. Four of them were hanged. Of the others, eleven were transported for life, three others for fourteen years, and the rest to various terms of imprisonment.²²

However, the main conclusion the Tilly group draw about the effectiveness of violence in the historical process is crucial. The presence or absence of violence, they conclude, makes very little difference to the historical outcome, 'but the collective action which leads to violence is the very stuff of history' (*italics added*).²³ What counts is not the presence or absence of violence, but whether or not there was collective action. 'Groups which did not develop the capacity to strike, to demonstrate, to turn away the tax collector lost power - or never gained it.'

It will be clear from this that the modes of action characteristic of passive resistance correspond to those of collective action, sometimes of the reactive type of struggle, more often of the proactive type as defined by the Tilly group. In this sense passive resistance, even if not always so called, can be seen as ranking alongside, but in contrast with, premeditated armed rebellion, at the heart of a tradition of 18th and 19th century European resistance culture.

Where the collective action was met by violence or repression on the part of the authorities, the protesters and their leaders still had a choice whether or not to retaliate, if only in the very limited sense of using violence in self-defence. The emphasis in the evolving tradition of passive resistance during the 19th century was on avoiding retaliatory violence. Only in the 20th century, however, under Gandhi's leadership, was an explicit concept of non-violence, which included the willing acceptance of suffering at the hands of the opponent, erected into a cardinal principle of this type of action. As we shall now see, as Gandhi developed his ideas on non-violence he sought to distance his methods from those of passive resistance, and evolved a new vocabulary in which to express them.

Notes:

1. Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, p. 76. Sharp's source is F.R. Cowell, *The Revolutions of Ancient Rome*, Frederick A. Praeger, New York 1962, and Thames and Hudson, London, 1962, pp.42-43. Cowell's account is based on the Roman historian Livy.

2. Stan Steiner, *The New Indians*, Harper and Row, New York, 1968, p. 220. Cited Sharp, p. 191.

3. The sanctions and inducements which societies without states rely upon to strengthen social cohesion and enforce mores are discussed in Michael Taylor, *Community, Anarchy and Liberty*, especially in Chapter 2, 'Social Order Without the State' pp. 39-94.

4. Taylor, *op. cit.*, especially pp. 82-6.

5. See Steven Duncan Huxley, *Constitutionalist Insurgency in Finland: Finnish 'Passive Resistance' against Russification as a Case of Nonmilitary Struggle in the European Resistance Tradition*, Finnish Historical Society (SHS), Finland, 1990, pp. 52-54.

6. See Charles Tilly, Louise Tilly, and Richard Tilly, *The Rebellious Century*, J.M.Dent and Sons, London, 1975, especially pp. 276-277

7. A point noted by Richard Davis in *Arthur Griffith and Non-Violent Sinn Fein*, Anvil Books, Dublin, 1974, p. 92

8. The account by Flavius Josephus is reproduced in Mulford Q. Sibley, *The Quiet Battle*, Anchor Books, 1963, pp. 111-115.

9. Anthony Black, 'St Thomas Aquinas: the State and Morality', in Brian Redhead, (ed) *Plato to Nato*, BBC Books, 1990 edition, p. 71

10. Clarence Marsh Case, *Non-Violent Coercion: A Study in Methods of Social Pressure*, first published by The



Century Co, New York and London, 1923, Reprinted by the Garland Publishing Co, New York and London, 1972, p. 64

[11.](#) Sabine and Thorson, *A History of Political Theory*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Fort Worth, 1973, p.338

[12.](#) Cited Sabine and Thorson, op. cit., p. 345

[13.](#) Huxley, op. cit., discusses this on pp.69-72. See also the more extended discussion of it in Sabine and Thorson, pp. 352-7.

[14.](#) Sabine and Thorson, op. cit., p. 352

[15.](#) Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1991 edition, especially pp. 118-23

[16.](#) John Locke, 'The True End of Government', in *Two Treatises of Government*, J.M.Dent in the Everyman series with an introduction by W. S. Carpenter, London and Melbourne, 1990 edition, p. 233

[17.](#) Ibid, p.237. Cited Huxley, op. cit., p. 73

[18.](#) Cited Steven Huxley, op. cit., pp. 73-74

[19.](#) Clarence Marsh Case, op. cit., pp. 97-8

[20.](#) As cited by Lord Denning in 'From Precedent to Precedent', The Romanes Lecture, 21 May 1959, Clarendon Press, Oxford, p.5

[21.](#) Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, translated with an introduction by George Bull, Penguin, Classics, Harmondsworth, 1986 edition, p. 70

[22.](#) Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, Penguin Classics, Harmondsworth, 1983 edition, p. 155

[23.](#) See *Anarchy* 63, Vol. 6, No. 5, May 1966, pp.129-152 which contains an English translation of the essay with an introduction by Nicolas Walter. The passage quoted appears on page 142

[24.](#) See *Anarchy*, op. cit., p. 138. Steven Huxley, op. cit., criticises La Boëtie's tract at greater length, pp. 67-9

[25.](#) A point strongly argued by Steven Huxley, op. cit., pp 67-9

[26.](#) For the history of the essay and its influence on pacifist and anarchist, see the introduction to it by Nicolas Walter in *Anarch*, op. cit., pp. 129-137

[27.](#) Cited in Huxley, op. cit., p. 26

[28.](#) Cited in George Woodcock, *Anarchism*, Pelican, Harmondsworth, 1963, p. 74

[29.](#) Cited in Huxley, op. cit., p. 27

[30.](#) Woodcock, op cit., p. 84

[31.](#) Edward Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1968, p. 107 n. The book was first published in 1963 by Victor Gollancz, London

[32.](#) Viscount Robert Stewart Castlereagh, Foreign Secretary at that time but widely held to be responsible for the passing of the Five Acts and the Peterloo massacre.

[33.](#) On the reaction to Peterloo see Thompson, op. cit, pp. 756-7, and 791

[34.](#) Ibid, pp. 791-2

[35.](#) Steven Huxley, op. cit., discusses the etymology of passive resistance, pp. 52-3

[36.](#) Ibid, p. 53

[37.](#) Cited in Huxley, op. cit., p. 54

[38.](#) Ibid, p. 54

[39.](#) See Walter H. Conser, Jr, Ronald M. McCarthy, David J.Toscano, and Gene Sharp (eds), *Resistance, Politics, and the American Struggle for Independence, 1765-1775*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, Colorado, 1986. The account here is based on essays in this book

[40.](#) John Adams to Dr Jedediah Morse, 29 November 1815, *The Works of John Adams*, Charles Francis Adams, ed, Little Brown, Boston, 1850-56, Vol 10, p.182. Cited by Conser et al, op. cit., p. 3

[41.](#) C. A. Macartney, *Hungary: A Short History*, Edinburgh University Press, 1962, especially Ch.7, 'Revolution and Reaction', pp.155-70, and A.J.P.Taylor, *The Habsburg Monarchy*, Macmillan, New York, 1949, Chapters V to IX

[42.](#) For details see Huxley, op. cit., especially Chapter IV, 'Constitutionalist Insurgency', pp. 143-252. See also David Thomson, *Europe Since Napoleon*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1981 edition, pp. 480-1

[43.](#) Arthur Griffith, *The Resurrection of Hungary: A Parallel for Ireland*, James Duffy and Co, M.H.Gill and Son, and Sealy, Bryers and Walker, Dublin 1904

[44.](#) T.M.Kettle 'Would the Hungarian Policy Work?', *New Ireland Review*, February 1905. Cited Davis, p.115

[45.](#) See Richard Davis, op. cit., p.93

[46.](#) See Huxley, op. cit., p.51, citing Gandhi (1958-1970), *Collected Works of Mohandas K.Gandhi*, The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, Delhi, Vol 7, pp. 213-4

[47.](#) Derek Fraser, 'The Agitation for Parliamentary Reform' in J.T.Ward, ed, *Popular Movements, c. 1830-1850*, Macmillan, London, 1970, pp.34-35. Cited Tilly, op. cit., p. 276

[48.](#) Richard Davis, op. cit., p. 92

[49.](#) See F.S.Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971, Fontana, London 1973. See



especially pp.164-74 in the Fontana, 1990 edition

[50.](#) Davis, op cit., p. 93

[51.](#) See Lyons, op. cit., pp. 407-8

[52.](#) Davis, op. cit., pp. 92-3

[53.](#) Huxley, op. cit., p. 58

[54.](#) Tilly, op. cit., pp.120-1

[55.](#) Henry David Thoreau, *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience*, Peace News, London, 1963, with an introduction by Gene Sharp.

[56.](#) Thoreau, op. cit, p. 13.

[57.](#) See his 'Letter to Dr. Eugen Heinrich Schmitt', reprinted in Leo Tolstoy, *Writings on Civil Disobedience and Nonviolence*, New Society Publishers, Philadelphia, 1987, p. 169

[58.](#) Tolstoy, op cit., p. 210

[59.](#) Ibid, p 213

[60.](#) Ibid, p. 183

[61.](#) Ibid, pp 287-93

[62.](#) Huxley, op. cit., p. 59. I question, however, whether there was a single 'articulated doctrine' since, as we have seen, individuals and groups adopted the method of passive resistance from a variety of motives and ideological perspectives

[63.](#) Tilly, op. cit., especially pp. 48-55

[64.](#) Ibid, p. 51

[65.](#) Ibid, p. 282

[66.](#) Ibid, p.282

[67.](#) Ibid, p. 249

[68.](#) Ibid, p. 249

[69.](#) Ibid, p. 282

[70.](#) Ibid, p. 23

[71.](#) Ibid, p. 248

[72.](#) G.D.H.Cole and Raymond Postgate, *The Common People: 1746-1946*, Methuen, London, 1946, p. 223

[73.](#) Tilly, op. cit., p.288.

[Click here to return to Civil Resistance - Randle Table of Contents](#) [1]

Source URL (modified on 13/08/2014 - 11:41): <https://civilresistance.info/randle1994/Ch-2>

Links

[1] <https://civilresistance.info/randle1994>