

SMASH

PACIFISM



A Critical Analysis of Gandhi and King

by Zig Zag

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Introduction

“In India we want no political strikes... We must gain control over all the unruly and disturbing elements or isolate them... We seek not to destroy capital or capitalists, but to regulate the relations between capital and labour.”

(Gandhi, quoted in *India and the Raj*, p. 219)

“The American racial revolution has been a revolution to 'get in' rather than overthrow. We want a share in the American economy, the housing market, the educational system and the social opportunities. This goal itself indicates that a social change in America must be nonviolent.

“If one is in search of a better job, it does no help to burn down the factory. If one needs more adequate education, shooting the principal will not help, or if housing is the goal, only building and construction will produce that end. To destroy anything, person or property, can't bring us closer to the goal that we seek.”

(Martin Luther King, quoted in *I Have A Dream*, p. 130)

“The liberal is so preoccupied with stopping confrontation that he usually finds himself defending and calling for law and order, the law and order of the oppressor. Confrontation would disrupt the smooth functioning of the society and so the politics of the liberal leads him into a position where he finds himself politically aligned with the oppressor rather than with the oppressed.

“The reason the liberal seeks to stop confrontation... is that his role, regardless of what he says, is really to maintain the status quo, rather than to change it. He enjoys economic stability from the status quo and if he fights for change he is risking his economic stability...”

(*Stokely Speaks*, 170)

Non-violence as an ideology adopted by social movements is a relatively new phenomenon. While people have used both violent and non-violent methods throughout history in struggles against oppression, depending on circumstances, it was not until the late 19th century that non-violence came to be promoted as a philosophy applicable to political action. By the early 20th century, groups began to emerge claiming nonviolence was the only way to establish a utopian society.

Most of these groups and their intellectuals derived their philosophies from organized religions such as Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Within these religions were sects that advocated pacifism as a way of life. Often overlooked in critiques of pacifism, this religious origin is an important factor in understanding pacifism and its methods (i.e., missionary-style organizing, claims of moral superiority, appeals to faith and not reason, etc.).

Ironically, considering that the most demonized group by pacifists today are militant anarchists, the leading proponents of pacifism in the 19th century also proclaimed themselves as anarchists: Henry David Thoreau and Leo Tolstoy (as would Gandhi).

In 1849, Thoreau published his book *Civil Disobedience*, which outlined his anti-government beliefs and non-violent philosophy. This, in turn, influenced

Tolstoy, who in 1894 published *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, a primer on his own Christian pacifist beliefs.

The idea of non-violence did not gain a large following, however, and indeed the 19th and early 20th centuries were ones of widespread violence and social conflict throughout Europe and N. America, as well as in Asia, Africa, and South America.

The first significant movement to emerge proclaiming pacifism as the only way was led by Mahatma Gandhi. It is based on this that the entire pacifist mythology of nonviolent struggle is formed, with Gandhi as its figurehead. Yet, Gandhian pacifism would still be seen as a strictly 'Third World' peasant phenomenon if it were not for Martin Luther King's promotion of it during the Black civil rights struggle in the US during the 1950s and '60s.

Today, there are many well intentioned people who think they know the history of Gandhi and King. They assume that nonviolence won the struggle for Indian independence, and that Blacks in the US are equal citizens because of the nonviolent protests of the 1950s.

Pacifist ideologues promote this version of history because it reinforces their ideology of nonviolence, and therefore their control over social movements, based on the alleged moral, political, and tactical superiority of

nonviolence as a form of struggle.

The state and ruling class promote this version of history because they prefer to see pacifist movements, which can be seen in the official celebrations of Gandhi (in India) and King (in the US). They prefer pacifist movements because they are reformist by nature, offer greater opportunities for collaboration and co-optation, and are more easily controlled.

Even recent history is not immune from this official revisionism. The revolts throughout North Africa and the Middle East in early 2011, referred to as the “Arab Spring,” are commonly understood to have been but the most recent examples of nonviolent struggle. While it was not armed, the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, and elsewhere, saw widespread rioting and attacks against police. In Egypt, where several hundred people were killed in clashes, nearly 200 police stations were arsoned and over 160 cops killed, in the first few months of the revolt.

Taking their cue from the “Arab Spring,” many Occupy participants also parroted the official narrative of nonviolent protest and imposed pacifism on the Occupy Wall Street movement, which began in the fall of 2011. But this narrative didn't start with Egypt, it began with Gandhi and was modernized and popularized by King.

Although there now exist a number of excellent critiques of pacifism, including Ward Churchill's *Pacifism as Pathology*, and Gelderloos' *How Nonviolence Protects the State*, they do not focus directly on the campaigns of Gandhi and King, the foundations and roots of pacifist ideology. In fact, it is their historical practise, and indeed the very actions and words of Gandhi and King themselves, that most discredit pacifism as a viable form of resistance. For this reason they are the focus of this study.

Zig Zag,
October 2012
Occupied Coast Salish Territory [Vancouver, Canada]



One of these is not like the others: Protesters throw Molotov in police van, Egypt 2011 (top), Street fighting & burning barricades in Tunisia 2011 (middle two), cop pepper sprays protesters in Occupy movement in California 2011 (bottom).

I. Mahatma Gandhi

Mohandas K. Gandhi was born into politics and privilege in Gujarati province, in north west India, on October 2, 1869, and died January 30, 1948 (assassinated by a Hindu nationalist). His father was a prime minister in the provincial government, his mother a devout Hindu. Gandhi's upbringing was middle-class and he was raised under Hinduism. Gandhi was married at age 13 as part of a traditional Hindu arranged marriage. His wife, Kasturbai, was the same age, and the two would eventually have four children together.

In 1888, at the age of 19, Gandhi travelled to London, England to attend law school. While living in the imperial capital, he befriended middle-class Britons, some of whom were members of the Vegetarian Society, which he joined. He also met members of the Theosophy Society, a new fad that merged various Eastern religious philosophies, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, with occult interests (a precursor to the New Age movement). Ironically, it was from these British citizens that Gandhi gained a renewed interest in Hinduism, due to the Society's romanticized views of Eastern religions.

After graduating from law school, in 1893, Gandhi returned to India but was unable to find employment. That same year, he travelled to South Africa to work for an Indian trading firm involved in a legal suit, and would reside there until 1914. It was in South Africa where Gandhi first became politically active, where he first developed his pacifist doctrine, and where some of his followers began addressing him as *Mahatma* ("great soul").

Gandhi in South Africa, 1893-1914

Gandhi arrived in Natal province, South Africa, in May 1893. At the time, some 41,000 Indians resided in the colony, many as indentured servants working on plantations, mines, and other labouring jobs. There were some 41,000 Europeans, and nearly 500,000 Black Africans (the survivors of a genocidal war of conquest carried out by European colonizers in Southern Africa).

Within the Indian community, there was also a small elite of middle-class merchants, traders and business owners. Contrary to his experience in London, where he was seen as more of a colonial curiosity, in S. Africa Gandhi was subjected to the same racism that Europeans in

the colony applied to Blacks and other Indians. He was thrown off a train for being in the first class section, even though he had a ticket for first class, because only Europeans could ride in first class. On his first day in court, he was told to remove a turban he wore.

Some European settlers despised Indians even more than the Blacks; the Indians were 'foreigners' and practised strange religions (Hindu and Muslim). Like the racism directed against Blacks, Indians were portrayed as "filthy & dirty," a source of sickness and disease.

Meanwhile, the government began enacting measures to limit Indian immigration, impose stricter controls, and eventually reduce the Indian population. This included restricting the right to vote and the issuing of licenses, as well as a 3 Pound annual tax for Indians not working as indentured servants (at the time, this was equivalent to six months wages for a labourer).

Gandhi began organizing against these laws, as well as other racial discrimination applied to Indians. In 1894, he helped establish the Natal Indian Congress, named after the Indian National Congress (which had formed in India in 1885). The NIC was an elite middle-class group whose members paid an annual membership fee of 3 Pounds. Gandhi's efforts and those of the NIC in opposing the government's

policies consisted of letter writing, petitions to officials, and publishing pamphlets.

In 1899, the *Second Anglo-Boer War* occurred, with Dutch settlers rebelling against British colonial authorities. The British, along with other countries in the Commonwealth (including Canada), waged a counter-guerrilla war against the *Boers* (Dutch-speaking colonialists). Gandhi called for Indians to join the British Army and thereby show their loyalty to the Empire, in the quest for equal rights and full citizenship.

The British military in S. Africa, however, had no interest in having Indian officers in its ranks, but did accept Gandhi's petition to organize an Ambulance Corps. With 1,000 stretcher-bearers, Gandhi was made the unit's commanding sergeant. When the war finished, the status of Indians was no better. In the meantime, Gandhi maintained his law practise and had considerable financial success. Along with working with his compatriots in the NIC, he also socialized with middle-class Europeans in the local Vegetarian and Theosophian Society's.

Overall, Gandhi's middle-class background and socialization informed his concept of struggle, including specific campaigns and tactics. Despite a large mass of highly exploited workers upon which to direct his efforts,



Gandhi, centre, with his staff in S. Africa.

Gandhi instead focused on those of concern to him and his middle-class constituents:

“Gandhi's dogged opposition to the *Natal Licensing Act* of 1897 was indicative not only of his determination to contest racially discriminatory legislation, but also to protect, as far as possible, the position of the [Indian] traders. The franchise issue [the right to vote] was also one that was far more relevant to [the middle-class] than to the [labourers] among Natal's Indian population. Cementing his own class position, Gandhi personally prospered. He had arrived in South Africa an almost penniless barrister on a one-year contract and with the promise of a three hundred pound fee. Having decided to stay, and as one of the only qualified Indian lawyers in South Africa, he was soon earning 5,000 pounds a year... In 1903 he opened a new law office in Johannesburg, which employed two clerks and a secretary, and where he remained for the next three years.”

(*Gandhi*, p. 51)

In 1903, Gandhi relocated to Johannesburg in Transvaal province, and began publishing the *Indian Opinion* newsletter. The next year, he established the Phoenix Settlement, a rural commune 14 miles outside of Durban, in Natal province. A circle of family and friends lived on the property, purchased by wealthy Indian merchants on behalf of Gandhi. Here, Gandhi first began working on his experiments for village life and establishing communes for religious-political training.

By this time, Gandhi had been studying the writings of Thoreau, Tolstoy, and Ruskin, associating with his friends in the Vegetarian and Theosophian Society's, and developing his concept of passive resistance (based largely on methods already in use by movements in India, including boycotts, pickets, and strikes).

By 1906, the ideas that would become the basis for his doctrine had begun to crystallize. Gandhi was now 37 years old and approaching middle-age. He and his wife had four children, and he had been practising law in S. Africa for 13 years. He had been the patriarch of a commune for two years. At this time, he undertook a vow of celibacy in order to 'purify' himself and to devote more time and energy to his political career. The vow of celibacy was common among Hindu priests (known as *brahmacharya*), and was believed to maintain a persons' vital energy that was otherwise dissipated during sex. He and his wife remained married, but slept apart (in his later years, Gandhi would “test” his vow of celibacy by sleeping next to young,

unmarried women who were his disciples).

Anti-Registration Campaign, 1906-09

In 1906, the Boer-dominated Transvaal government issued new legislation requiring Indians to register with the government, to be fingerprinted, and to carry passes at all times. These measures were part of a larger policy to limit, control, and ultimately expel Indians.

In September 1906, Gandhi encouraged all Indians to refuse to be registered during a large meeting in Johannesburg. By January 1908, some 155 Indians were in jail for engaging in the 'passive resistance' campaign. Gandhi himself was jailed three times in 1908-09, for a total of six months.

Coming from a middle-class and sheltered background, Gandhi's brief experiences in jail were at first highly disturbing. Chief among his complaints were that the Indians had been placed in the same jails as Black Africans and expected to eat the same food.

Gandhi the Racist

Often erased from pacifist versions of history is Gandhi's intense racism towards Blacks in S. Africa, whom he referred to as “*kaffirs*.” After a brief period of imprisonment in 1908-09, Gandhi described his experiences in the jails, alongside Black prisoners:

“Kaffirs are as a rule uncivilized - the convicts even more so. They are troublesome, very dirty and live almost like animals.”

(*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, p.199)

Writing on the subject of immigration in 1903, Gandhi commented:

“We believe as much in the purity of race as we think they [the Europeans] do... We believe also that the white race in South Africa should be the predominating race”

(*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, p.255)

“Indeed, [Gandhi's] struggle can be seen as part of a collective determination that Indians should not be reduced to the disenfranchised level of Africans but enjoy the same rights as white citizens of the Empire. Gandhi and other members of the Indian community consistently tried to get themselves excluded from classification with Africans over such matters as housing, trading rights, transportation and prison conditions. In this respect Gandhi



A squad of Indian stretcher bearers organized by Gandhi during the Second Anglo-Boer War to assist the British military.

has been bluntly termed a racist. Certainly, he accepted and promoted aspects of the segregation doctrine, in so far as he called for a social status for Indians that was different from that of the Whites and Blacks. Gandhi organized a second Volunteer Ambulance Corps during the Zulu Rebellion in Natal in 1906..."

(Gandhi, p. 52)

As it was in 1899, the ambulance brigade Gandhi helped organize in 1906 was another attempt to prove loyalty to the Empire as part of the 'civil rights' campaign. In this case, it was to assist the British military not against rebel White settlers, but against Indigenous Blacks resisting British colonialism.

The Zulu uprising against the British and a new poll tax began in January 1906 and continued until June of that year, when it was crushed by a large military assault in the Mome Valley, where 500 rebels were killed. Over the course of the revolt, as many as 10,000 Zulus were involved, with numerous battles and attacks on British police, soldiers, and tax collectors. Some 2,000 Zulus were killed, many more injured, and 4,700 taken prisoner.

Part of Gandhi's racism, and his belief that Indians should be given equal rights over Blacks, was his view that India was itself a civilization, while Africans were still primitive children. This was the basis of the claim for equality with White citizens of the Empire. If Gandhi had any sense of anti-colonial struggle and solidarity, any analysis of imperialism, he would have seen the Blacks as natural allies against a common enemy. In fact, Gandhi wasn't anti-colonial or anti-imperialist—he supported the British Empire and sought to have Indians recognized as equal citizens within it.

These were not the naive beliefs of a young man who would have many years to mature and evolve his ideas. Gandhi was 40 years old and had been involved in politics in S. Africa for some 15 years. Nor would Gandhi have a later *epiphany* (a spiritual realization), for his had already occurred by 1906.

Gandhi the Betrayer

From 1907-09, the passive resistance campaign against the Transvaal government occurred. Protests were held, with Indians burning registration papers. In late January 1908, Gandhi met with the colonial governor and

left the meeting believing that an agreement had been reached: if a majority of Indians voluntarily registered, the act would be repealed.

"In the face of other Indians who wanted the act repealed in its entirety, Gandhi took the lead in registering. His action was seen as a betrayal and, far from unifying the Indian community in the Transvaal, intensified many of its divisions..."

"He suffered a further humiliating defeat when he discovered that, despite the voluntary registrations, the act remained in force."

(Gandhi, p. 56)

This would be but the first example of Gandhi betraying movements by accepting the weakest reforms from the state, a tendency he would maintain until his death.

He would always seek compromise and conciliation, and this in fact was a built-in part of his doctrine of nonviolence.

Civil Rights Campaign, 1913

In 1910, the various British and Boer colonies were organized into the Union of South Africa. The new regime began enacting legislation once again aimed at restricting and imposing greater controls over Indian immigrants. A court also invalidated Hindu and Muslim marriages.

These measures prompted a renewed phase of mobilization among Indians. Gandhi and the Natal Indian Congress began forming plans on how to counter the new laws. In September 1913, two groups set out from Gandhi's Tolstoy Farm (established in 1910 near Johannesburg in Transvaal province) to cross the borders between Transvaal and Natal and purposefully violate

the new laws. They sought arrest as a means of publicizing their struggle. Some were arrested and sentenced to three months in jail, including Gandhi's wife, Kasturbai.

In November 1913, Gandhi helped organize and lead a march of 2,000 Indians across the border into Transvaal from Natal, to march to Tolstoy Farm. Gandhi was arrested, along with others. At the same time, striking



Founding members of the Natal Indian Congress, Gandhi is in centre of back row.



Indian indentured servants working on a S. Africa plantation.

Indian mine workers were violently attacked by military police, who forced them back to work. In a matter of days, some 50,000 workers were on strike and 7,000 Indian workers jailed.

Gandhi was released in late December, 1913. In early 1914, the S. African regime agreed to negotiate with him and the Natal Indian Congress. In May of that year, the *Indian Relief Bill* was passed with all demands included: recognition of Indian marriages, easing of immigration and residence controls, ending of indentured labour, and abolition of the annual tax for Indian immigrants. In December 1914, Gandhi left S. Africa and returned to India.

While some Gandhians claim this period as an example of pacifist civil disobedience liberating the Indians in South Africa, the situation in that country soon declined to one of institutionalized apartheid, with much greater restrictions and repression for both Indians and Blacks alike.

Gandhi's Rise to Power in India

The Indian National Congress

Because of the publicity he had received as a result of the civil rights struggle in S. Africa, Gandhi was treated as a minor celebrity upon his return to India in 1915. He was welcomed by both British and Indian elites, and invited by the British Viceroy (governor of the India colony) for a meeting. Gandhi would join the Indian National Congress (INC), a political organization dominated by elite, middle-class Hindu professionals (doctors, teachers, journalists, lawyers, and landlords) who sought greater political power under the British *Raj* (the term for the colonial regime in India). The INC would play a pivotal role in the Independence struggle, and would eventually form the government of India after 1947. It would also serve as a model for the African National Congress (ANC).

A.O. Hume, a former British government official, established the INC in 1885 and remained its general secretary for 22 years. He was concerned about the growing potential for rebellion in India, as evidenced by revolts over the previous two decades in various regions following the 1857 Mutiny, when large numbers of Indian soldiers revolted against the British. For Hume, it was vital to gain the loyalty of the Indian middle-class as a means of blunting the growing potential for anti-colonial rebellion.

The INC pursued a moderate campaign advocating, at most, Dominion status for India, using petitions, public meetings, and resolutions, all directed towards legal constitutional change. Overall, it was loyal to the British Empire and exerted little political pressure on the colonial regime.

In the late 1890s, there was an upsurge of militancy among social movements in India. New voices began to accuse the INC of complacency, if not outright collaboration. Advocating boycotts and protests, and a strident call for independence, these militant factions became known as 'Extremists' (or Radicals). The 'Moderates' were the mostly middle-class professionals in control of the INC, and who continued to advocate strictly legal means ('constitutionalism').

The Radicals grew to become the majority in the INC by 1907, when a violent split occurred and the Moderates reconstituted the INC, excluding the Radicals. A strict adherence to legal constitutionalism was put in place, and the Radicals refused to participate. By 1917, the Radicals had re-entered the INC after extensive negotiations, and once again regained control.

By this time, the INC was a leading force in the independence movement, although there were always many



King George V overseeing results of British tiger hunting safari in India, 1912.

movements and groups outside of the domain of the Congress. As Gandhi emerged as a national figure in 1917-18, the British increased their repression against the Radicals, which enabled the Moderates to once again retake control of the INC (for more discussion on the Radicals vs. Moderate struggle, and Gandhi's emergence as a national leader, see below).

Despite his official reception upon returning to India in 1915, Gandhi was politically marginalized and played little role in the independence struggle at the time, or the INC. In 1916, the Congress renewed their campaign for home rule, and by 1917 some 60,000 people had joined the Home Rule Leagues. For the most part, Gandhi was a bystander and looked at as a novelty by his mostly Westernized, middle-class compatriots in the Congress.

While the INC carried out its home rule campaign, Gandhi began to search for a role. He lacked credibility in the INC and had no base of support. Despite this, he saw that the INC remained a largely elitist organization, with little mass support (a charge the Radicals had made back in

the 1890s). He began to advocate that the peasants were in fact the 'salvation' of India and a potent force that only needed to be organized (again, Gandhi was not the first to observe this). After making a public declaration of his views, Gandhi was approached by an agricultural worker who invited him to visit plantations in northern India to see for himself the oppression of the peasants.

By this time, Gandhi had developed a largely idealized view of the peasants. Due to his aversion to European civilization and its corrupting influences (including materialism and industrialism), Gandhi saw in the peasant villages the "uncolonized" Indian, still carrying the best values of Hindu civilization (humility, sacrifice, suffering, and pre-industrial culture). He also saw the peasant village as the ideal community, and one that could form the basis for self-sufficiency through farming and spinning of cloth, as well as other craft work. He also understood that, at the time, 90 percent of the population in India lived in some 770,000 rural villages.

Champan, 1917: Gandhi the Peasant Leader

In April 1917, Gandhi arrived in Champan, a rural agricultural village in the north. Almost immediately, he was ordered to leave the area by local British officials. Based on his experiences in S. Africa, Gandhi decided to challenge the order, and was subsequently arrested. Gandhi pleaded guilty to the charge. Before he could be sentenced, however, the Lieutenant Governor of the province wrote to the Magistrate judge and ordered the charge be withdrawn. Gandhi was informed he was free to carry out his investigations, and that he would receive official support if he requested it. A Commissioner was dispatched and accompanied Gandhi during his field work.

Dressed in his peasant clothing, with the prestige of being a trained lawyer, Gandhi was welcomed by the peasants. His brush with the law, and his quick release, served to raise his status among the people. He was able to take testimony from over 8,000 workers in 800 villages, documenting cases of abuse by European plantation owners.

As was the case in S. Africa, Gandhi also had the support of local Indian merchants, who were engaged in competition with the European plantation owners. The Lieutenant-Governor eventually invited Gandhi, as the sole representative of the peasants, to be part of an official government committee investigating the peasant's

grievances. Numerous reforms were recommended by the committee, including rent reductions. On Sept. 29, 1917, Gandhi signed an agreement with the plantation owners that implemented all of these.

Gandhi's work in Champan was widely reported in the press. The success in Champan seemed to validate Gandhi's methods, including his insistence that, in accordance with *satyagraha* (nonviolence), the conflict must be resolved through negotiated settlement and compromise. It was a "spectacular victory," even though the basic structures of exploitation and oppression were never challenged. It was also one he could not have achieved without the actions of the British, who provided him with legitimacy and credibility as a movement leader.

Gandhi's saint-like image was enhanced and he was catapulted to national attention as a leader of the peasants. Stories of Gandhi's magical powers also began to circulate. Observers, noting how hundreds and even thousands of peasants would gather to see him, noted that he was seen as "a god who came to save them."

In February 1918, Gandhi became involved in a mill workers strike in Ahmedabad, near the ashram commune he had established. At the request of the workers, he agreed to help them organize. He had them pledge to a

strict code of nonviolence. When they began to consider ending the strike, Gandhi went on a fast to exert pressure on the workers (not the mill owners, according to Gandhi) to continue on. After three days, Gandhi succeeded in negotiating with the mill owners a wage increase and the strike ended.

From March to June, 1918, Gandhi was involved in another peasant movement in Kheda. This campaign

was against high land taxes imposed by the colonial government. The region had been hard hit by droughts and then flooding. Gandhi was able to achieve minor concessions for the poorest cultivators after a campaign of civil disobedience, including the non-payment of taxes.

As a result of these victories, Gandhi's reputation and influence grew even more. He now had more supporters in the INC, many of whom also saw the need for expanding the INC to a mass-based organization. Some saw Gandhi, with his messiah-like image and growing popularity among the peasants, as an ideal tool to achieve this (as, some would later assert, did the British).

There was still also considerable debate in the INC and the broader independence movement about which path



Riches to Rags: Gandhi, from professional lawyer to professional peasant, a guise he adopted in S. Africa and which served him well in his political career in India.

to take: constitutionalism or militant resistance? Reform or revolution? To this debate, Gandhi's satyagrah appeared to offer a third choice: mass nonviolent protest.

The Rowlatt Campaign, 1919

In 1919, Gandhi, now a rising member of the INC, opportunistically proposed a nonviolent campaign against a government committee developing new counter-insurgency measures known as the Rowlatt Committee (named after its head official, British judge Sir Sidney Rowlatt). The committee recommended new legislation which became known as the Rowlatt Bills, a sort of “anti-terrorist” set of laws. These empowered the government to carry out preventive arrests without warrant, indefinite detention of 'dangerous' persons, and to try seditious cases by three judges rather than by jury.

The Rowlatt Bills were widely condemned throughout India. The INC's campaign against these new laws was opportunistic because Gandhi, and his fellow Moderates in the INC, constantly condemned the very militants the new laws were primarily aimed at.

The new legislation, along with declining socio-economic conditions resulting from World War 1, (including restrictions on trade), as well as new taxes, contributed to heightened anti-British feelings. In addition, the Russian Revolution of 1917 had also inspired revolutionary movements in India. Some Moderates feared the potential rebellion the anti-Rowlatt campaign could unleash.

The official INC campaign began on April 6, 1919, with a Day of Action comprised of protests and limited *hartal* (withdraw of labour, services, and the shutting of stores). In many cities and towns, however, protests escalated into clashes and rioting (including Bombay, Delhi, Lahore, and even Ahmedabad, where martial law was declared). Sabotage of telegraph and railway lines also occurred. British police opened fire on demonstrations, killing and wounding scores of people.

The worst state violence was to occur in the Punjab. Here, the movement against the Rowlatt Bills was particularly strong. Some 10,000 mostly Sikh protesters gathered in a park in Amritsar, on April 13, 1919. On previous days, clashes had occurred, as well as some deaths. When the April 13 protest occurred despite a ban on rallies, a British officer (General Reginald Dyer) ordered his troops to open fire. As many as 400 were killed, with a thousand more injured:

“The massacre sent shock waves throughout India, and aroused intense anger and deep antagonism to British

rule. If a single event were to be chosen as the critical turning point in the entire history of India's nationalist movement, the Jallianwala Bagh [a park in Amritsar] massacre would surely be it, for it revealed the intrinsic violence of British rule, a savage indifference to Indian life, and an utter contempt for nationalist feeling and peaceful protest.”

(*Gandhi*, p. 111)

Gandhi declared he had made a “Himalayan miscalculation” in launching the movement without adequately training the people in nonviolence, and called off the campaign on April 18, 1919 (perhaps he should have trained the British military in his pacifist doctrine to start with). He also did a three day fast in 'penance' of the violence that occurred. Many, including some of his own supporters, ridiculed his decision.

“The circumstances under which Gandhi called off the Rowlatt Satyagraha were a clear acknowledgement that his first essay into all-India politics was a palpable failure. The fact that the campaign had been called off without removing the Rowlatt laws from the statute book was in itself a defeat for Gandhi. However, what was even more humiliating for him was his failure to instil among his followers the doctrine of non-violence. Gandhi was dismayed by the discovery of the depth of hatred and ill-will that his supporters bore towards the British rulers... Gandhi's agony over the turn of events was also aggravated by the anger that some of his fellow-leaders displayed towards the decision to terminate the Rowlatt Satyagraha. They claimed that Gandhi's decision was impulsive, ill-conceived and sacrificed the gains of a highly successful mass movement for the dubious benefit of upholding the principle of non-violence.”

(*Indian Nationalism*, pp. 251-52)

For their part, the British now saw the need for their vastly outnumbered forces in India (100,000 at most, against 330 million Indians) to reconsider the indiscriminate use of force on such a large scale, and resorted to criminalization (including greater resources for police and intelligence, use of the courts and prisons):

“...and for the next 20 years the colonial authorities tried to find ways of moderating and refining the use of force during civil disobedience movements, though without surrendering the practical necessity... for some degree of controlled violence by the state and the propaganda of attributing violence, or its incitement, to the nationalist



Amritsar, April 13, 1919, when as many as 400 Indians were killed by the British Army.

camp. The burden of responsibility for controlling nationalist agitation after April 1919 rested with the police, the courts and the jails... with the army held in reserve.”

(*Gandhi*, p. 112)

Despite the setback of the Rowlatt campaign, Gandhi retained considerable backing from Moderate factions within the INC. In 1920, he was elected president of the Home Rule League. He now had strategic control of the INC and proposed a Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience Movement for *swaraj* ('Home Rule'), announcing that within a year India would have home rule.

Ghosh explains the means by which the Congress expanded its mass base to better control the people's resistance, and how Gandhi manoeuvred himself into a position of near-total control of the INC itself:

“The Congress, which was an upper class organization until 1920, adopted a new constitution at its Nagpur session at the end of the year to reorganize itself. Gandhi, one of the most astute men of his time, could realize, particularly after the experience of the Rowlatt [campaign], and of the growing discontent and militancy of the people, that a reorganization of the Congress was the demand of the new situation, which seemed quite explosive. The time when India's political elite... had 'worked and sparred together in a fine balance,' was over. The masses had intervened. The old leadership, which clung to the 'constitutional methods' alone and had few direct contacts with the masses, failed at this critical hour and had to yield [their] place to a new one... Attempts were made to build a well-knit organization on a hierarchical basis, that would send its roots into the villages... the new constitution made a major innovation by providing for a year-round working committee [controlled by Gandhi]... The [new] constitution initiated a process of concentration of all organizational powers in the hands of a small [clique] around Gandhi, and democracy within the Congress was formal while what prevailed was the rule of the [clique].”

(*India and the Raj*, p. 95)

Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience Movement, 1920-22

Based on the lessons of the previous campaign, Gandhi implemented widespread training among members of the Home Rule League in his pacifist religion. These were to be the core of the volunteers conducting the nonviolent actions. He propagated the rules for the campaign more vigorously, and approached it all as a 'test' of his doctrine.

The Non-Cooperation Movement, as it came to be

known, was to unite all classes in India against British colonial rule, beginning with the systematic rejection of European culture and trade. This was based largely on boycotts of products, escalating to a withdrawal of labour & services for the British (a hartal). Another aspect of such campaigns included 'social boycotts' of those who didn't support the boycott. None of these were original ideas and had been used by militants for several decades by this time. Some were also traditional practises of Hindus or Muslims, used for centuries.

Gandhi first called on the Indian middle-class to renounce European clothing and products and to withdraw from government positions as well as British run schools and colleges. A general boycott of British goods was promoted, as was the production of locally made clothing (*khadi*, a rough and heavy home-made cloth that would become a staple of Gandhi's movement). Pickets of clothing and liquor stores were carried out, and protests organized, including the public burning of European clothing.

Many activities used by Gandhi and local organizers were chosen for their accessibility (ones that many common people could participate in), and their higher likelihood of arrests (but with only minor penalties). By early 1922, there were some 17,000 convictions for offences related to the campaign. But neither the people, nor the British, would fully cooperate with Gandhi's plan.

As the Non-Cooperation Movement began in 1920, the British were at first unsure how to respond, considering the massacre in Amritsar the previous year. The movement, promoted through the INC's Provincial Congress Chapters, gained widespread support, even in remote areas. But as the campaign progressed, the spectre of violence increased and began to overshadow that of civil disobedience:

“The Malabar Rebellion broke out in late August 1921 and involved a protracted guerrilla war against Indian and British troops. Armed gangs of Mappilas [who were Muslims], estimated to number 10,000, held control of the southern [districts]... for several months... Added to this in November 1921 there were several outbreaks of urban violence and rioting, sparked by the hartals [social & labour strikes] and demonstrations against the visit to India of the Prince of Wales. Disturbances in Bombay city on 17-18 November... left 58 people dead... In more than one hundred and thirty separate incidents, individuals were attacked, policemen injured, liquor shops destroyed and cars and trams damaged. Gandhi did what he could to quell



Magazine cover commemorating Mappila rebellion of 1921.

these outbreaks, touring riot-torn areas of the city, talking to community leaders, issuing appeals, and, in one of his first uses of this technique for political purposes, fasting for five days to try to restore calm.”

(*Gandhi*, p. 124)

As many as 10,000 people may have been killed during the Malabar revolt, primarily rebels repressed by a brutal British military response which included imposing martial law and deploying British and Gurkha regiments. As many as 45,000 were arrested during the six month long rebellion.

During the November riots in Bombay on November 17, the khadi-clad demonstrators looted shops, burned foreign cloth and wrecked automobiles, shouting, as Gandhi himself witnessed, “*Mahatma Gandhi ki jai*” [Victory to Mahatma Gandhi]. “Never,” he wrote later, “has the sound of these words grated so much in my ears”

(*Gandhi: A Life*, p. 255).

In response to these rebellions, Gandhi wrote:

“Their violence is likely to alarm us, it impedes our progress... I can see all the time that the most serious obstacles in our path come not from the government but from ourselves... The complete victory of non-violent non-cooperation will be possible only if we conquer this enemy inside us.”

(quotes *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, in *India & the Raj*, p. 225)

Clearly, even the messiah-like Gandhi could not control the rebellious masses. In October 1921, the British had expanded the level of repression against the Non-Cooperation Movement with mass arrests of INC members and banning their meetings. Despite the spiralling violence, including the huge riots of November, Gandhi still saw no need to end the campaign. People were suffering in their quest for justice, and that was the whole point of Gandhi's doctrine.

Then, in February 1922, the remote village of Chauri Chaura was the site of a massacre when police opened fire, killing several demonstrators. As the police withdrew to their station, a large mob surrounded it, setting it on fire. 21 police were burned alive, some being hacked to death as they attempted to escape.

Gandhi condemned the killings of police in a statement entitled “The Crime of Chauri Chaura.” He urged those who killed the police to fast for penance, and to turn themselves in (none apparently did). He also urged others to pressure those responsible for the killings to surrender. The deaths of the police, and not the people, caused Gandhi to unilaterally declare the campaign over:

“When Gandhi learnt of this, he stopped the movement without even consulting his colleagues... As soon as Gandhi withdrew the agitation, the Government

swooped on him and put him behind bars and this action caused no ripple in the country.”

(*History of the Indian Revolutionary Movement*, p. 100)

“...many educated leaders believed that Gandhi had acted impulsively and halted at the very point of success. Jawaharlal Nehru later wrote: ‘We were angry when we learnt of his stoppage of our struggle at a time when we seemed to be consolidating our position and advancing on all fronts.’”

(*Indian Nationalism*, p. 286)

“To describe Gandhi's decision as a “national calamity” was indeed right on the mark. To lay such stress on non-violence - that too only three years after he had been encouraging Indians to enroll in the British Army was not only shocking, it showed little sympathy towards the Indian masses who against all odds had become energized against their alien oppressors.

“For Gandhi to demand of the poor, downtrodden, and bitterly exploited Indian masses to first demonstrate their unmistakable commitment to non-violence before



Chauri Chaura, 1922: the burnt corpses of cops killed when a large mob set fire to their police station in retaliation for a massacre.

their struggle could receive with Gandhi's approval (just a few years after he had unapologetically defended an imperial war) was simply unconscionable. Clearly, Gandhi had one standard for the Indian masses, and quite another for the nation's colonial overlords. But this was not to be the first occasion for Gandhi to engage in such tactical and ideological hypocrisy.”

(“Gandhi - ‘Mahatma’ or Flawed Genius? National Leader or Manipulative Politician?” *South Asia Voice*, October 2002 Online edition)

“The... decision caused considerable dismay among the Congress leaders, most of whom were in prison, and left the rank and file disgruntled. Subhas Chandra Bose, who was in jail... wrote afterwards that [the] chance of a

lifetime... had been lost.

“Gandhi saw the justice of his colleagues' viewpoint. 'The drastic reversal of practically the whole of the aggressive programme may be politically unsound and unwise,' he affirmed, 'but there is no doubt that it is religiously sound.'”

(*Gandhi: A Life*, p. 259)

The civil disobedience campaign was then replaced with the Constructive Programme of 'community improvement' work, including the spreading of spinning-wheels, manufacture of clothing (*khadi*), improving sanitation, etc. Gandhi and others began to wonder if the peasants would ever be suitable for nonviolent civil disobedience. Shortly after, Gandhi himself was arrested, on March 10, 1922, and charged with sedition (to which he pleaded guilty),

“... saving him from the fiercest recrimination of his compatriots and the undermining of his [national] leadership position at their hands...”

(*Gandhi and Civil Disobedience*, p. 5)

In jail, Gandhi became increasingly ill and required an emergency appendectomy, carried out by British doctors. He was released in 1924 on medical grounds, the British seeking to avoid the death in custody of such a high-profile (and perhaps still useful) person. Although he maintained some influence in the INC, Gandhi had also suffered a decline in credibility. His satyagrah-nonviolent doctrine was seemingly discredited, and Gandhi himself appeared unsure as to how to proceed. Although he considered leaving the INC, supporters convinced him to stay on, and he was elected president of the Congress in 1925 by his Moderate colleagues (he served just one year, preferring to control the Congress through intermediaries). During this time, he succeeded in having a resolution for the establishment of the All-India Spinners' Association (AISA) passed.

Gandhi now focused his energy on the AISA as a means to regain a popular mobilizing base. He recognized that the spinning and clothes manufacturing put him into closer contact with the village peasants. By the end of 1926, the association would claim some 40,000 spinners. Subhas Chandra Bose, a political opponent of Gandhi in the INC, noted the broader strategy Gandhi was employing:

“As AISA branches spread throughout the country, 'the Mahatma was once again building up his own party which was to be of invaluable service to him when he desired to recapture the Congress machinery once again.'”

(Bose, *The Indian Struggle 1920-42*, quoted in *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience*, p. 23)

“[Gandhi] had a definite political objective in the establishment of such an organization, for it would provide training and keep employed an exclusive corps of political workers who could be effectively mobilized in any future nonviolent campaign...”

(*Gandhi: A Life*, p. 272)

While focused on the AISA, Gandhi portrayed himself as removed from the political intrigues and infighting that dominated the INC, especially with the breakdown of national unity that followed the failed Non-Cooperation Movement in 1922. While he was widely discredited in the movement, and opposed by militants within, Gandhi's apparent distance from the infighting of the INC helped him retain a moral edge over his colleagues (in the unseeing eyes of the public).

Although he served a one-year term as the INC president in 1925, he announced 1926 as a “year of silence,” during which he would not be involved in public organizing. Despite this 'strategic retreat', Gandhi continued to be involved behind the scenes in the INC and to offer guidance promoting accommodation and compromise with the British:

“In 1926 at the Gauhati Congress, for example, he spoke out on the resolution to redefine swaraj [home rule] as complete independence, warning members not to bite off more than they could chew. They should aim for what was currently possible and make it clear that they wished to remain

as imperial partners if this permitted equality and the evolution of true swaraj.”

(*Gandhi and Civil Disobedience*, p. 21)

At this time, Gandhi secluded himself in his commune project near Ahmedabad, in the Gujarat district of Bombay province, which he had established shortly after arriving back in India (in 1915). He continued his training of disciples which he had begun in S. Africa:

“It was designed as a laboratory for experiments with truth and a power house which would produce public workers for the service of their country. To it Gandhi devoted much of his attention in the 1920s, particularly during 1926.”

(*Gandhi and Civil Disobedience*, p. 25)

In 1928, Gandhi returned to public attention when a satyagrah (nonviolent campaign) was launched in the town of Bardoli, also in the Gujarat district. The campaign



Gandhi promoted spinning as a means of achieving independence from the British.

began in February 1928, primarily against excessive land taxes imposed on the peasants. A majority of the 87,000 peasants were organized to not pay the tax.

Despite arrests and the confiscation of property, the campaign eventually succeeded in gaining reforms from the government, including the release of prisoners, reduction in taxes, and even compensation for damages. Although the movement was organized by local peasants, Gandhi's advice was sought throughout the campaign and his public association with it helped revive his status as a champion of the poor. Meanwhile, within the INC, new and younger voices were also rising, calling for greater action and renewed militancy for independence.

In December 1928, the INC issued a resolution calling on the British to accept their proposal for Dominion status, threatening another campaign of civil disobedience if it was not accepted within a year. During that time, Gandhi worked to expand the boycott of foreign clothing and to promote the manufacture of homemade clothing (*khadi*) through spinning-wheels. He would constantly promote this work, which he saw as necessary for self-sufficiency, an act of decolonization, an economic boycott, and a meditative form of labour. The campaign had limited success, however. The local clothing produced was heavy and rough, and not always cheaper than those imported from England.

Gandhi's extensive speaking tours, during which he promoted the spinning-wheel and pacifism, also kept him in the public spotlight and maintained his image as a man of the people. It also resulted in large sums of money being raised through donations, which he collected on behalf of the poor.

By the end of 1929, as the INC awaited a response from the British on their ultimatum, political tension increased with revolutionary groups escalating their attacks on police and government officials. When the British failed to respond favourably to the INC proposal, Gandhi was given a mandate to carry out the campaign of civil disobedience, which he had been planning for during the previous year. Gandhi chose to focus on the salt tax, a measure imposed by the British in the 19th century that forbid the individual manufacture and possession of salt, similar to taxes on alcohol and opium at the time.

Salt March, 1930

Gandhi's "Salt March" began on March 12, 1930, with a group of 78 men from his commune in Ahmedabad. They walked for 24 days over a 241 mile route to Dand, a coastal village to the south. The march itself has been noted for its religious symbolism (a shepherd with his staff,

leading his flock, all dressed in white, on a pilgrimage to a 'holy site').

By the time the procession arrived on April 5, there were several thousand onlookers who followed, but who were distinctly separate from the tightly controlled pilgrims of Gandhi's flock. There was also extensive media and film coverage.



Gandhi collecting salt to initiate a new civil disobedience campaign in 1930.

Gandhi ritually cleansed himself in the sea and then proceeded to collect salt from the shoreline. This act of protest was widely publicized, both nationally and internationally, and attracted widespread support among Indians. It was a profound propaganda success.

The salt tax was an ideal target because it was clearly unjust—salt was naturally available and yet the British claimed a monopoly on it. Some regions of India even imported salt from England. The tax was an issue Gandhi believed could unite all Indians, regardless of class, religion, ethnicity, or gender. As it was not a critical resource for the

British, it also carried less risk of harsh repression. It also challenged the legitimacy and morality of an imperial power that deprived its colonial subjects of a basic, easily accessible, and essential, native resource. As with many aspects of Gandhi's satyagraha, the salt tax was not a new idea. It had been a source of agitation, and a target for civil disobedience, for decades.

Following the April 5 taking of salt, the second phase of the campaign began, with widespread collection and manufacture of salt by previously selected and trained protesters, at times comprised of crowds forming protective circles around boiling pots of sea water. Other protests involved 'raids' on salt quarries.

On May 21, 1930, during a raid on a salt quarry north of Bombay, scores of protesters were violently beaten by police armed with *lathis* (wooden staffs with metal tips). Some 2-3,000 trained protesters marched to the site and, in orderly rows, were clubbed down, one by one. According to one news account of the protest:

"Not one of the marchers even raised an arm to fend off the blows. They went down like tenpins... From where I stood I heard the sickening whack of the clubs on unprotected skulls... Those struck down fell sprawling, unconscious or writhing with fractured skulls or broken shoulders... The survivors, without breaking ranks, silently and doggedly marched on until struck down."

(Webb Miller, quoted in *Gandhi*, p. 148)

Police later intercepted other columns of protesters marching to the site. The violence, widely reported by the media, once again caused widespread public anger against the British. The salt campaign ended with the coming of the monsoon season in June. It was most successful in coastal areas and those with salt quarries. In other areas, local Congress groups focused on other issues, and civil disobedience continued in various forms. By the end of the year, some 60,000 people had been arrested and imprisoned.

“As early as May 1930 it was clear that civil disobedience was a very severe challenge to the British.. [Viceroy] Irwin recognized that the raj [British rule] faced a 'formidable menace to instituted government' and would need all its resources to combat it; while his Home Member confessed that he had gained 'the impression during the last week or two from various parts of India that in spite of all that has been done Government may not be retaining that essential moral superiority, which is perhaps the most important factor in this struggle’”

(*Gandhi and Civil Disobedience*, p. 123)

Although the salt satyagrah was relatively brief, and had little effect on the salt market, it had re-ignited popular enthusiasm for anti-British sentiment. In addition, the high profile nature of the Salt March further elevated Gandhi's status as a 'messiah' and a powerful symbol of salvation for the poor. The British delayed arresting him for nearly a month, until May 4, 1930. The delay itself portrayed the British as hesitant, and when it occurred it caused widespread protest, and in some cases rioting and clashes with police. Gandhi would be held without trial and not released until January, 1931.

Compared to the 1920-22 campaign, that of 1930 was marked by far greater control over the protests, facilitated in part by better organization within the INC. This time, the concepts of nonviolent civil disobedience were better understood. The month-long pilgrimage by Gandhi and his 78 followers also helped set a tone and example for the orchestrated campaign that followed.

Despite this, violence was a constantly lurking factor which occasionally erupted during protests. Armed groups also continued to carry out actions that frustrated the British and made them appear even more impotent, including raids on armouries.

Beginning in February 1931, the Viceroy Lord Irwin began negotiations with Gandhi as the sole representative of the INC (agreed to by the Moderates), and on March 5 an agreement was reached known as the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. Although there were no major concessions, it proposed a Round Table Conference be held

in London in November. Gandhi's unilateral decision to end the civil disobedience campaign, as he had in 1922, angered many Congress members. However,

“Gandhi was less concerned with the contents of the Pact than with its symbolic importance, seeing his single-handed negotiations, as if on equal terms [with the British Viceroy], as a victory in itself... And, indeed, for the remaining months of 1931, the Congress did assume something of the character of a parallel government...”

(*Gandhi*, p. 155)

The London conference, which Gandhi reluctantly attended, soon became bogged down in constitutional arguments and division between various religious and ethnic groups, including the concerns of Muslims (who did not see the INC as representing their interests, viewing it—and Gandhi—as primarily concerned with Hindus). Gandhi socialized with middle-class British progressives outside the conference and had tea with King George. On his return to India, he travelled through Europe and included in his

tour a brief and “awkward” meeting with Mussolini, the fascist dictator of Italy.

As for the round table conference, the British were not interested in Indian independence or constitutional reforms. Because of the economic crisis resulting from the 1929 Depression, Britain was more concerned than ever about retaining its colonial markets.

When Gandhi returned to India, he found Irwin replaced by Willingdon as the Indian Viceroy. The INC, frustrated by the lack of progress in

constitutionalism, swung back in favour of renewed civil disobedience. The INC Moderates, along with Gandhi, used these campaigns as political leverage in their negotiations with the British. The Radicals participated because they saw the increased agitation as contributing to mobilizing the people into anti-colonial resistance in general.

Now using a hard line approach, Willingdon responded with arrests of INC leaders and new laws targeting civil disobedience, including “unlawful associations” and boycotts. Gandhi himself was arrested on January 4, 1932 and imprisoned without trial (under an old British statute). As in most of his prison experiences in India, Gandhi was given preferential treatment and was a model prisoner.

Under his previously communicated directives, the civil disobedience campaign continued during his imprisonment. Between January 1932 and March 1933,



Gandhi at round table conference in London, seated fourth from right at back table, 1931.

some 120,000 people were arrested. By the second half of 1932, however, the movement had largely ground to a halt, and was eventually called off on April 7, 1934.

The Untouchables, 1932-34

Despite his imprisonment in early 1932, Gandhi maintained a public profile through his writings and statements, which he was permitted to carry out by the British. He also switched focus from the salt tax and home rule campaigns to that of the Untouchables, a mass of people born into 'low-caste' positions that condemned them to lives of poverty and exploitation.

This strict caste system resulted from traditional Hindu concepts of social division and hierarchy. The high-caste were primarily the priests and ruling elites. The low-caste were seen as subhuman, tasked with the most demeaning labour, including cleaning toilets. The caste system was organized with a strict segregation of public life, including separate paths, temples, living areas, etc. Gandhi was not the first to promote the cause of the Untouchables, or to advocate reforms in Hinduism.

At the time, the Untouchables were estimated to number 50 million, or 15 percent of the overall population. Although portrayed as entirely altruistic campaign, the Untouchables were also another strategic base which Gandhi sought to exploit (as he had the peasants). Gandhi's campaign around the Untouchables was also influenced by his paternalistic morality and authoritarian views.

The Untouchables became a national issue in 1932 when the British offered electoral reforms that would create separate seats for them, in essence establishing the Untouchables as a separate political entity from their Hindu overlords:

"[Gandhi regarded] the Untouchables as an essential and integral part of the Hindu community and indeed, along with the peasantry, one of the principal responsibilities of its educated and reforming leaders. To lose such a huge part of the Hindu constituency, whether through separate electorates or religious conversion, was, for him, highly perturbing. This is one illustration... of Gandhi's increasingly defensive and proprietorial attitude towards the Hindu community and its leaders' 'civilizing mission'... With separate electorates, Gandhi believed, caste Hindus would feel... absolved from responsibility for the 'uplift' of the Untouchables, whereas one of his concerns since 1915 had been to elevate them to a position of moral respectability within Hindu society, and through education and sanitation, by the abjuring of meat and alcohol and the rejection of impure lifestyles and livelihoods, enable them to become worthy members of Hindu civilization."

(Gandhi, p. 177)

When the Untouchables were unmoved by the demands of Hindu nationalists, including Gandhi, to reject the British reforms, Gandhi took more drastic action. On September 20, 1932, Gandhi threatened he would "fast unto death" from his prison cell. After five days, the Untouchable representatives conceded and rejected the proposed reform. Gandhi, now seeing greater potential in championing their cause, termed the Untouchables *Harijan*—a patronizing term meaning "children of god." Their divine association resulted from their suffering and humility, while their portrayal as child-like called out for education and parenting.

In February 1933, still imprisoned, Gandhi established a Service Society for Untouchables, a variation of the philanthropic service organizations he had set up for "uplifting" the peasants and comprised largely of his middle-class followers. He also began writing and publishing a Harijan newsletter, again appropriating the voice of an oppressed class.

In May 1933, Gandhi was released from jail. He was re-arrested in August 1933 for disobeying a restraining order, but was released shortly after, following an 8 day hunger-strike. In November 1933, he began a national Harijan tour and a campaign to desegregate Hindu roads, temples, and wells. He also advocated for

greater education to help "uplift" the Untouchables, and solicited donations on their behalf.

The campaign created intense division between Hindu traditionalists and moderates, and would earn Gandhi the hatred of Hindu nationalists for the rest of his life (and eventually result in his death). In the following months, several assassination attempts were made on his life. Nor would Gandhi earn any praise from the Untouchables:

"The Harijan movement was seen as a political gimmick which did not seriously address, let alone resolve, the real social and economic issues that lay behind their continuing oppression. Not surprisingly, therefore, among many *Dalit* [Untouchable] organizations Gandhi is remembered with neither affection nor respect. A manifesto issued in 1973 by the Dalit Panthers of Maharashtra... accused Gandhi of being 'deceitful, cunning, an orthodox caste-ist...'"

(Gandhi, p. 180)



Gandhi in jail, where he received preferential treatment from the British.

World War 2

In the mid-1930s, the British carried out electoral reforms that extended voting rights to 16 million Indians (out of a total of 330 million). The INC decided to participate in the 1937 elections, and subsequently won 716 seats out of 1,585 seats in provincial governments. They took office and ministry positions in seven out of eleven provincial governments. Over the next two years, the INC enacted minor reforms but also carried out violent repression of workers and even protesters. Divisions between Hindus and Muslims increased, with some INC governments imposing Hindu language and traditions in their districts.

In 1939, India was drawn into World War 2 as part of the British Empire, after Britain declared war on Germany. To protest India's involvement in the war, while the British denied any form of 'home rule' or democratic rights, the INC resigned from government. Gandhi opposed exploiting the vulnerability of the British during its hour of need, but the majority of the Congress saw it as an opportunity to increase pressure on the British:

“Britain's position was extremely vulnerable. To many Indians this seemed to be the most appropriate time to launch civil disobedience. 'We do not seek independence out of Britain's ruin,' Gandhi wrote. 'That is not the way of nonviolence.' The Congress Working Committee did not share the Mahatma's pacifism and felt that Britain's difficulties could afford a favourable opportunity.”

(*Gandhi: A Life*, p. 370)

Although he opposed the idea, in October 1940, under Gandhi's direction, another civil disobedience campaign was launched. By the end of 1941, more than 23,000 people were arrested. The movement was not very large, however, and was “the weakest and least effective of all the Gandhian national campaigns”

(*Gandhi*, p. 207).

“The Mahatma now proceeded to launch his campaign of civil disobedience which was at the outset individual and symbolic, for he wanted to ensure that the British were subjected to the minimum anxiety and inconvenience.”

(*Gandhi: A Life*, p. 372)

The main 'actions' carried out were the making of anti-war speeches, for which many high-ranking INC members were arrested. Some received jail sentences of

three months, while others, such as Nehru, were sentenced to four years.

Then, on December 7, 1941, Japan declared war against the US and Britain and began a rapid military advance through South-East Asia, including northern China, Malaya, and then Burma. By the end of the year, the INC prisoners were released as the British sought to rally support for the war effort.

During the war, India would be a crucial part of the British defence of its colonial territories in Asia; some 2.5 million Indians served with British forces, and India supplied large amounts of textiles, munitions, food, and medical supplies to the war effort. The country was also a major staging ground for British troops.

While revolutionaries saw the war as an opportunity for greater anti-colonial struggle, others in the INC (such as Nehru) saw it as part of an international 'anti-fascist' struggle, and they supported war against the Axis (Germany and Italy, and later Japan). Yet, even the 'anti-fascist' factions generally adhered to the INC policy of not supporting the war effort until the nationalist demands were met.

Japanese military aggression alarmed the British, and they moved to gain stronger loyalty from their Indian subjects. They began making promises of granting Dominion status and being open to further negotiations regarding independence, after the war. The INC refused, however, and in April 1942 the talks collapsed, with both the INC and Muslim League rejecting the British offer.

Quit India Movement, 1942

The INC's central demand was for independence, with control over political, economic, military, and police institutions. British military forces would continue to be based in the country to wage war against Japan. And once independence was achieved, India would fully participate in the war as willing allies. Gandhi himself stated that:

“India is not playing any effective part in the war,' he told a correspondent of the *Daily Herald*. 'Some of us feel ashamed that it is so... We feel that if we were free from the foreign yoke, we should play a worthy, nay, a decisive part in the World War.'”

(*Gandhi: A Life*, p. 381)

In August 1942, the INC began its Quit India Movement of civil disobedience, again directed by Gandhi.



Quit India protest, which started as a weak INC campaign to exploit British vulnerability during WW2 but then erupted in revolt.

As the movement was set to begin, however, the British declared the INC illegal and arrested its leaders. Gandhi was also arrested, and would not be released until May 1944. Despite the arrest of the leadership, the campaign began.

The country erupted in rioting and widespread sabotage. Some 332 railway stations and nearly 1,000 postal and telegraph stations were destroyed, 208 police stations damaged or destroyed, 2,000 police wounded and 63 killed. Some areas in northern India were taken over as liberated zones by armed movements.

“The arrests of the national leaders resulted in mass demonstrations which the government attempted to suppress rigorously. Soon a Quit India revolt flared up that the imprisoned leaders were powerless to control. The programme of nonviolent cooperation was never carried out... the rank and file of Congress were left to act on their own initiative and resources. Mobs gathered in cities and rural areas and attacked... symbols of British rule and power. They set fire to railroad stations, signal boxes and post offices. Police stations and other government buildings were also attacked. Soon a powerful underground movement sprang into existence and its leaders and workers moved secretly across the land, fomenting rebellion. The rebels cut telephone and telegraph wires, blew up bridges and tore up railroads. The campaign was short but sharp...”

(Gandhi: A Life, p. 384)

In response, the British deployed massive military force, opening fire on protesters and killing over 1,000 in a number of violent incidents. Some 92,000 were arrested. It was the largest deployment and use of British military force since the 1919 massacre in Amritsar. By the end of September 1942, the rebellion had been largely suppressed.

By 1944, the Indian National Army (INA), an armed military force organized by Bose over the previous two years in Asia, had entered India. It numbered some 20,000 and was largely comprised of Indians serving in the British Army who had been captured by the Japanese in Hong Kong, Malaya, and Burma.

After some fighting in India, the INA was defeated by British and Indian soldiers in May 1945. Those elements that did not disperse were captured, and many later convicted and given long jail terms, including three officers—one Hindu, one Sikh, and one Muslim.

The INA and subsequent trials attracted widespread support and sympathy among Indians, including among Indian troops in the British Army. These troops were beginning to grow mutinous over the severe punishments given to convicted members of the INA, as well as their own conditions serving under British officers. Due to the growing opposition, the British released several of the prisoners:

“The Commander-in-Chief, the chief authority of the army, acted in accordance with the wishes of the army. Nearly 80 percent independent votes of the army were in

favour of their release...

“The mutinies that followed made it even clearer...”

(History of the Indian Revolutionary Movement, p. 239)

“In February 1946, the Royal Indian Navy mutinied in Bombay, where some three thousand naval ratings rose in violent protest against their treatment and living conditions... Naval establishments in Karachi, Calcutta and Madras were also affected... The mutiny inflamed the public mood and brought huge crowds into the streets, sparking off serious riots, arson, and looting in several of the big cities. Appeals to the public to remain calm went unheeded. Both the military and the police opened fire on several occasions. In six days of disturbances about two hundred people were killed and over one thousand injured.”

(Gandhi: A Life, p. 408)

Post-War Apocalypse

At the end of WW2, in 1945, the British began negotiating the terms of its withdrawal from India. Faced with the destruction and resulting instability of the war, as well as anti-colonial resistance throughout the Empire, the British had decided to withdraw from India rather than engage in a hopeless counter-insurgency effort, now compounded by a mutinous army. They would instead focus on winning in smaller colonial battlefields such as Malaya, Kenya, etc.

During negotiations, the Muslim League had pressed for the creation of Pakistan as a separate and independent state for over a decade. The Muslims at this time comprised some one-quarter of India's population. The region proposed for Pakistan were several northern provinces with majority Muslim populations. Partition was strongly opposed by Hindu nationalists, including Gandhi. Offering the basic Hindu rationale for opposing the partition of India, Gandhi stated:

“The 'two-nation' theory is an untruth... The vast majority of Muslims of India are converts to Islam or are the descendents of converts. They did not become a separate nation as soon as they became converts.”

(Gandhi: A Life, p. 368)

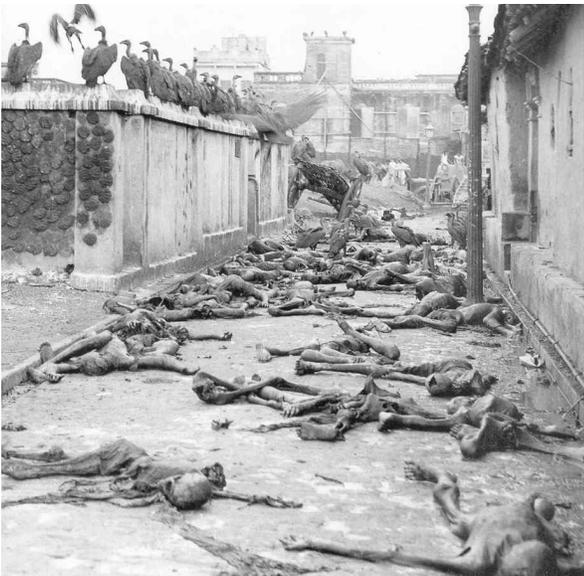
This logic angered many Muslims, who asserted that they had a very different culture, religion, and way of life. This, some claimed, was the basis for establishing a separate independent Muslim state. To create political pressure during the negotiations, the Muslim League called for a Day of Action, in August 1946. Three days of rioting and murder occurred, with thousands killed in 'communal' clashes between Muslims and Hindus. In Calcutta alone, an estimated 4,000 people, primarily Hindus, were killed and

15,000 injured. Major rioting again occurred in October, and then continued into February 1947, when thousands more were killed.

On August 14, 1947, India and Pakistan were established as separate and independent states. As a result of the partition, several hundred thousand people were killed—Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus. Almost immediately, Kashmir became a war-zone between Indian and Pakistani forces fighting for possession. In India, the Hindu-dominated INC became the ruling party and would remain in power for nearly 50 years.

The loss of India was the greatest loss to the British Empire since the American Revolution. Lord Mountbatten, then Governor-General of India as it transitioned to independence, ironically remarked: “At this historic moment, let us not forget all that India owes to Mahatma Gandhi, the architect of her freedom through nonviolence.”

(*Gandhi*, p. 223)



The result of communal rioting in 1946. The rapine and slaughter increased dramatically in 1947, when India gained Independence and was also partitioned.

At this time, Gandhi was in his late 70s. In an attempt to salvage something from the nightmare of death and destruction, he toured the riot zones on pilgrimages aimed at restoring peace and calm between Hindus and Muslims. In January 1947, Gandhi wrote in his diary:

“All around me is utter darkness. When will God take me out of this darkness into His light?” On May 31, 1947, he wrote “My life's work seems to be over. I hope God will spare me further humiliation” (quoted in *Gandhi*, p. 222).

For Gandhi, the ruin and destruction that accompanied independence were proof of the utter failure of his doctrine:

“[I]ndependence on 15 August 1947 came as a day

not of victory but of mourning, disillusionment and despair. Gandhi reflected this in October 1947 when he remarked with deep bitterness: 'It is I who am to be blamed. There has been some flaw somewhere in my ahimsa [nonviolence]’”

(quoted in *Gandhi*, p. 223)

On January 30, 1948, Gandhi was assassinated by a Hindu nationalist, opposed to his “pro-Muslim policy” as well as his “childish insanities” and domination of the INC.

Myths of Gandhian Nonviolence

As noted, one of the greatest myths promoted by pacifists is that Gandhi's nonviolent campaign liberated India. This is typical of pacifist revisions of history to portray nonviolence as an inherently superior and more effective form of struggle. This revision is accomplished by erasing that of militant resistance, as well as other violent social forces unleashed by foreign invasion and occupation.

A current example of this revisionism can be seen in the writings of Taiaiake Alfred, a Mohawk professor at the University of Victoria who promotes Gandhian methods among Indigenous peoples through his 'Wasase' movement.

According to Taiaiake Alfred, “non-violent resistance... has been historically widespread and effective against all types of repressive regimes” (*Wasase*, p. 52). Despite such a sweeping endorsement of nonviolent resistance, Alfred offers no example other than Gandhi, which he promotes as “The middle path between raging violence and complacency... The Indian mass movement against British colonization was not passive, but militantly pacifist, and it actively confronted power in a strategic, creative & tactically diverse manner without using violence... the basic Gandhian approach is a solid conceptual foundation for Onkwehonne [Native] resurgences” (*Wasase*, p. 55).

Although not widely acknowledged, Gandhi's non-violent campaign was but one part of a mass movement that also involved revolts, armed resistance, assassinations, bombings, riots, etc., not to mention the massive destruction inflicted on Britain during the course of World War 2.

At the time of Britain's withdrawal in 1947, it was facing armed insurrections in colonies throughout Asia and North Africa. In India, they were faced with a large, overwhelming, and hostile population that was clearly intent on forcing them out using force if necessary. More than Gandhi's nonviolent campaigns, these factors led the British to withdraw from direct imperial control of India and to hand power over to local elites that had collaborated with them (which turned out to be the Indian National Congress).

In response to a recent effort by US-based 'aid' agencies to promote the movie *Gandhi* (released in 1982) as well as its message of nonviolent struggle among Palestinians (the Gandhi Project), Ali Abunimah (editor of the Electronic Intifada), wrote:

"While one can admire Mohandas Gandhi's nonviolent principles, one can hardly point to the Indian experience as a demonstration of their usefulness in overthrowing a colonial regime. Indeed, Gandhi's concepts of satyagraha, or soul power, and ahimsa, or nonviolent struggle, played an important role during the Indian independence struggle, however the anti-colonial period in India was also marked by extreme violence, both between the British & Indians and between different Indian communal groups. Anti-colonial Indians committed a wide variety of terrorist acts; the British government was responsible for numerous massacres and other atrocities; and communal violence before, during, and after independence claimed the lives of millions of people. One simply cannot argue that Indian independence was achieved in a nonviolent context."

("The Myth of Gandhi and the Palestinian Reality," retrieved April 2010:
www.countercurrents.org/paabunimah090904.htm)

If Gandhi's nonviolent doctrine didn't liberate India, and certainly didn't achieve independence on its own accord, and the post-Independence period has been one of large-scale bloodshed and war, why is the Gandhi myth so widely promoted?

For Gandhi followers, the Gandhi myth proves the superiority of pacifism, even though it is based on outright lies and historical revision. For the imperialist rulers, it serves to promote the idea that pacifism is successful at achieving radical social change.



Gandhi & Lord Mountbatten having tea.

Gandhi the Collaborator

"[The British] were sufficiently astute and statesmanly to see the importance to Britain of bringing civil disobedience to an end and using Gandhi as a means to draw the Congress back from confrontation to constitutional action."

(*Gandhi*, p. 152)

Gandhi frequently played a co-opting and pacifying role, including the 1907-09 campaign against registration in S. Africa (when he was the first to voluntarily register), and then in India in 1919, 1922, and 1931, when he called off nonviolent campaigns that had escalated to militant resistance.

At every opportunity, Gandhi condemned revolutionary movements and acts of rebellion among the people. Although he

promoted civil disobedience, Gandhi the lawyer also advocated strict obedience to the law and loyalty to the Empire. He urged those who participated in revolts to turn themselves in, and others to inform on them. He agreed with the execution of soldiers who had disobeyed orders to fire on protesters. Not only was he not anti-imperialist or anti-colonial, Gandhi was not even anti-capitalist:

"In India we want no political strikes... We must gain control over all the unruly and disturbing elements or isolate them... We seek not to destroy capital or capitalists, but to regulate the relations between capital and labour."

(Gandhi, quoted in *India and the Raj*, p. 219)

Although the Moderates are often said to have had the same objective as the Radicals, but differences in methods, this is not true. The Moderates goal was to gain greater political power under the British, and to install themselves as the ruling elite. This is why they had the backing of the Indian middle-class and business sectors. The Radicals sought complete independence, and many advocated revolutionary change: the overthrow of capitalism and the abolishing of the class system, replacing it with communism.

For these reasons, Gandhi has been described by some as being an asset of the British—who actively promoted Gandhi as a legitimate leader of the people:

"Gandhi's [national] role was in part made possible by the British. At times they were willing to risk high stakes for his cooperation because of their reading of his public image and his influence over his compatriots. At other times they closed the doors to him... Their willingness or refusal to deal with Gandhi affected his value to Indians:

when they treated him as a [national] leader they confirmed him in that position, and when they refused to do so they tended to erode his standing.”

(*Gandhi and Civil Disobedience*, p. 12)

Gandhi's role as a collaborator was part of a long-established colonial strategy of the British. The INC itself was established in 1885 to perform the very role Gandhi played some thirty years later. A.O. Hume, the former British government official who established the INC and remained its general secretary for 22 years, stated his goals in establishing the Congress, in 1888:

“Do you not realize that by getting hold of the great lower middle classes before the development of the reckless demagogues [leaders who appeal to mob instincts], to which the next century must otherwise give birth, and carefully inoculating them with a mild and harmless form of the political fever, we are adopting the only precautionary method against the otherwise inevitable ravages of a violent and epidemic... disorder.”

(quoted in *India and the Raj*, p. 21)

India's Independence in 1947, when the INC became the new government, was itself the fulfilment of a British strategy articulated 30 years earlier. On August 20, 1917, the British moved to counter the growing rebelliousness that had emerged in India as a result of economic decline arising from WW1, as well as the effects of the Russian Revolution that year. The Secretary of State for India articulated the overall British strategy regarding India:

“The policy of His Majesty's Government... is that of the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire.”

(quoted in *India and the Raj*, p. 106)

Over a decade later, the Viceroy of the day continued to ponder the same basic question regarding the Independence movement:

“In 1929, Viceroy Lord Irwin also felt that the 'real question' was 'whether all this Indian nationalism that is growing and bound to grow, can be guided along imperial [lines] or will more and more get deflected into separatist lines.’”

(quoted in *India and the Raj*, p. 107)

For his part, Gandhi served a vital role to the

British by helping to combat militant resistance and diverting struggles back into legal constitutional methods, using civil disobedience as a 'safety valve' to blunt growing rebelliousness among the people:

“The primary aim of the Rowlatt Satyagraha of 1919, the Non-cooperation Movement of 1920-22 and the Civil Disobedience movement of 1930-31, as Gandhi planned them, was to forestall or divert mass anti-imperialist... struggles which he apprehended. As he repeatedly stated, by initiating such a movement he sought to 'sterilize the forces of violence' that might prove a threat to the raj and its domestic allies. The secondary aim was to secure some concessions for the domestic exploiting classes by demonstrating the leadership's ability to control the masses and to protect the vital imperialist interests.”

(*India and the Raj*, p. 111)

Gandhi, in a letter to the *Times of India*, April 3, 1920, stated:

“The country requires some definite action. And nothing can be better for the country than noncooperation as some definite action. The forces of violence cannot be checked otherwise” (quoted in *India & the Raj*, p. 204).

Gandhi himself admitted his intentions of countering the revolutionary forces. In a 1930 letter to the British Viceroy, Lord Irwin, Gandhi explained his efforts to counter the militants prior to his Salt March:

“It is common cause that, however disorganized... the party of violence is gaining ground and making itself felt. Its end is the same as mine. But I am convinced that it cannot bring the desired relief to the dumb millions. And the conviction is growing deeper and deeper in me that nothing but unadulterated nonviolence can check the organized violence of the British government... as well as against the unorganized violent force of the growing party of violence... Having an unquestionable and immovable faith in the efficacy of non-violence as I know it, it would be sinful on my part to wait any longer.”

(*Gandhi in India*, p. 117)

“Gandhi's primary purpose was to forestall, divert and contain revolutionary struggles; the secondary one was to win some concessions for the big bourgeoisie [capitalist class].”

(*India & the Raj*, p. 344)



AO Hume, the former colonial official who first proposed the INC and was its general secretary for 22 years.

“It is true that the controlled, limited mass actions within the bounds of nonviolence, seemingly anti-imperialist, that Gandhi had started in 1919, 1920-21 and 1930-31, helped to spread anti imperialist feelings among the people. They had, indeed, a dual impact. In order to win the masses over from the path of anti-imperialist struggle when such struggle had already broken out or was about to do so, the Congress leaders were forced to employ some anti-imperialist rhetoric and launch some mass actions, however restricted was their scope. These, no doubt, contributed to the rousing of the masses. On the other hand, they helped to confuse the people and dissipate a revolutionary situation and their abrupt withdrawals would plunge the country into the gloom of frustration and fratricidal strife.”

(*India and the Raj*, p. 24)

Suniti Kumar Ghosh, a well known Indian communist, describes Gandhi’s non-violence as,

“an ideal weapon with which to [weaken] the anti-imperialist spirit of the people. Gandhi himself declared that his satyagraha technique was intended to combat revolutionary violence. It may be borne in mind that this prophet of non-violence, though violently opposed to the use of violence by the people in the struggle against British imperialism, actively supported, whether in S. Africa, London or India, the most violent wars launched by the British masters and, towards the close of his life, was in favour of war between India & Pakistan and approved or suggested the march of troops into Junagadh, Kashmir and Hyderabad...”

“British imperialism recognized him as the national leader. Like General Smuts, many Viceroys including Willingdon regarded him as an asset. In combating the militant forces of anti-colonial... struggle, the British ruling classes counted on his help and he never failed them... The Indian business elite hailed him: his message of non-violence, his satyagraha, his faith in the raj, his political aspirations, his abhorrence of class struggle... his determination to preserve the status quo, his ‘constructive programme’ intended to thwart revolutionary action—all these and more convinced them that in the troubled times ahead, he was their best friend.”

(*India & the Raj*, Vol. 2, web: <http://archives.econ.utah/archives/penn/1/1997m11.a/msg00039.htm>)

Class

As noted, Gandhi's views on class were formed by his own middle-class background and status. It was also influenced by his Hindu beliefs and the separation of society into four distinct, ranked, classes. His Hindu nationalism, and a belief in its basic social structure, were behind his opposition to the Untouchables being granted electoral seats (and why he didn't oppose the existence of Untouchables in principle, only how they were treated).

Class struggle, therefore, was never on Gandhi's mind except as a terrible source of violent revolution (as it was to the middle-class Moderates of the INC and their business associates). Gandhi maintained his own middle-class interests even though adopting the guise of a peasant holy man:

“Gandhi's appeal to the socially conservative [merchants and other middle-class Indians] was based on several things, which helps to explain his attraction for the upper sections of the peasantry but also his limitations as a peasant leader. One part of this was Gandhi's emphatic non-violence. As property-holders, albeit on a relatively modest scale, and as a relatively high-class status group with a stake in the social status quo, the [merchants] were drawn to a movement which promised to free them from the vexatious exactions of colonial rule without threatening violent revolution and a revolutionary social upheaval by subordinate peasants and landless labourers...”

(*Gandhi*, p. 91)

Dadabhai Naoroji, elected INC president three times, regarded the Indian upper classes and professionals as having the same interests as those of the British:

“[T]hey are the powerful chain by which India is becoming more and more firmly linked with Britain'. By the educated classes, Naoroji had certainly in mind their upper stratum which mostly provided the leadership of the political organizations of the landlords and the big bourgeoisie...”

“The fate of these classes or strata was intimately bound up with the fate of the colonial regime.”

(*India and the Raj*, p. 12)

“For the period 1885-1888, it is estimated that no less than 46 percent of the [INC] delegates were lawyers, journalists and doctors... What is striking is the fact that four out of five of these educated delegates were lawyers. Several interlocking factors accounted for the undue



Founding members of the INC in 1885; Indian lawyers, doctors, journalists, businessmen, landowners.

prominence of the legal fraternity in Congress politics in these years. The study of British law, including constitutional theory and history... and the opportunity to travel to district towns and rural localities for professional reasons, which could be utilized to build political links, had all helped to galvanize the lawyers into the vanguard of modern political movements...

“A second pillar of support for the early Congress was the bourgeoisie. Industrialists, merchants, bankers, moneylenders, petty shopkeepers, *zamindars* [landlords] and landholders accounted for a sizable element of the delegates who attended the annual convention of the Congress... 32 percent of the delegates who attended the conventions between 1892-1909 came from the landed gentry and the commercial classes...”

(*Indian Nationalism*, pp. 126-27)

“Remaining outside the orbit of Congress influence were elements of Indian society which had gained little from the beneficial changes wrought by British imperialism in India. The peasantry, the rural artisans, the working class employed in factories, mines... minorities such as Muslims, and depressed castes such as the [Untouchables] had all experienced the disorientating effects of British policies but without enjoying any of its material benefits...”

(*Indian Nationalism*, p. 129)

“Gandhi, while appearing publicly as a peasant leader and constantly repeating his opposition to the salt tax as a struggle on behalf of India's 'starving millions', also remained in many respects attached to, or influenced by, business interests. The commercial middle classes while wanting to utilize mass discontent to secure concessions from the British were anxious at the same time to keep it within measured bounds and secure 'an honourable settlement'.”

(*Gandhi*, p. 155)

In 1921, Gandhi condemned the strikes of railway and steam ship workers then occurring. Writing in *Young India*, June 15, 1921, he stated:

“In India we want no political strikes... We must gain control over all the unruly and disturbing elements or isolate them... We seek not to destroy capital or capitalists, but to regulate the relations between capital and labour.”

(*India and the Raj*, p. 219)

Gandhi also incorporated conciliation and compromise into his satyagraha doctrine. Every use of pacifist struggle was to be preceded by negotiation, and always concluded with a mutually agreeable resolution to all sides in the conflict.

Radicals and Moderates

The early struggle between the Radicals and Moderates in the Indian National Congress helps understand the strategic role Gandhi played for British imperialism in countering the emerging revolutionary forces in India. It is also good case study of how reformists co-opt resistance movements and collaborate with the state in general.

Moderates, as noted previously, came to be the term used for factions of the INC that advocated strict legal constitutionalism, and whose *swaraj* (home rule) consisted of a Dominion status, similar to Canada and still firmly a part of the British Empire. They were primarily middle-class Indian professionals, a class whose interests they represented and whose support they had. They did not seek any form of open anti-colonial conflict and promoted class conciliation (since class war was contrary to the interests of their constituents and benefactors). The Moderates were the



Riot in Calcutta against British rule in India.

original founders of the INC in 1885. Today, they would be referred to as reformists.

The Radicals arose in the 1890s, comprised of militants who accused the INC of being too complacent and even collaborative. Aurobindo Ghose, a Bengali revolutionary, accused the INC of being a “middle-class organ” in 1893 (in a Bombay newspaper article entitled “New Lamps for Old”). His writings became popular among younger militants and influenced Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who would later emerge as a leader of the Radicals.

The Radicals version of *swaraj* was total independence, and they promoted more active measures to achieve this, including boycotts and protests (though not necessarily violent, and not because they were pacifists). They accused the Moderate's tactics of being ineffective, of having no mass base or actual strength, their goal of

Dominion status through constitutional reform as a weak strategy and objective. The Radicals were also referred to as Extremists, as a smear.

In 1905, the British enacted the Bengal Partition, dividing the province into two separate ones (East Bengal and Assam). The partition angered large numbers of Bengalis, who not only resented the arrogance of the British but also the loss of political and economic power that would occur.

The partition was part of a restructuring of colonial administration, according to the British. The Bengalis greeted the official partition in October 1905 as a day of mourning. Daily protests began and a mass anti-partition movement emerged. The Bengalis organized widespread *swadeshi* campaigns, meaning “of one's own country.” Boycotts of British and European goods were launched, including cotton products (i.e., clothing and fabrics), sugar, salt, tobacco, and leather.

The movement was first mobilized through newspapers and public forums, then by public persons vowing to take part in the boycott, then by priests directing their temple members to also participate. Protests included the public burning of European clothing and fabrics. The boycott escalated to include pickets of stores that continued selling European products, then forcible blockading of stores as well as 'social boycotts' of those who didn't support the boycott.

Over time, the anti-partition movement included large numbers of students, particularly in Calcutta and other cities. The movement also included workers, who carried out strikes and participated in protests, as well as peasants. It also contributed to the emergence of a new wave of revolutionary groups aimed at forcing out the British through armed struggle (see below).

In 1905, the same year partition came into effect, the Bengalis attempted to have the INC endorse their boycott and denounce the partition. The Moderates claimed it was not related to 'home rule' and opposed the effort.

The Bengalis had the support of the Radicals, however, who began to promote the Bengali boycott, expanding the movement into Bombay and then the Punjab region.

Typically opportunist, the Moderates attempted to use the mobilization as political capital in their dealings with the British:

“The Moderates hoped that Morley [British Secretary of State] would initiate a bold policy of Indian reform, including the extension of representative institutions. When Gokhale [a leader in the INC] visited

Britain in April 1906, he succeeded in extracting promises from Morley about a new instalment of constitutional reforms, reduction in military expenditure, increased grants for education and the abolition of the unpopular salt tax. However, Morley impressed upon Gokhale the need to keep the Congress agitation in check, especially over the issue of [Bengali] partition... Gokhale accepted the force of Morley's argument and returned to India convinced that the Congress must eschew extremism in this hour of opportunity for India.”

(*Indian Nationalism*, p. 163)

While the Moderates sought greater concessions from the British as a result of the Bengali and Radicals agitation, the Radicals themselves,

“in contrast, concentrated their energies in building their strength in India. Partition still supplied them with the major grievance to rally support. Continued British intransigence on this issue, coupled with official curbs on the more extreme forms of Bengali agitation, had the effect of fuelling the boycott, *swadeshi* and national education movements. Extremist leaders like Aurobindo and Bipin Chandra Pal

even began to advocate passive disobedience and non-cooperation with the British.”

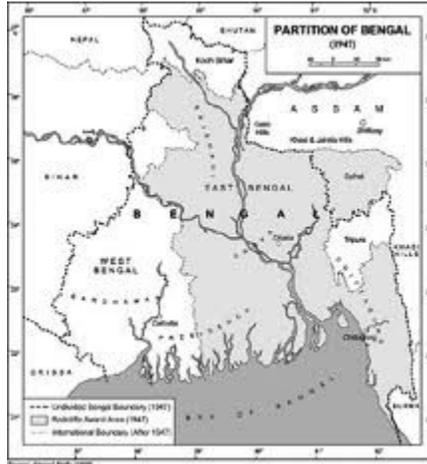
(*Indian Nationalism*, p. 163)

Ten years before Gandhi returned to India to champion nonviolent civil disobedience, boycotts, and *swadeshi*, Radicals were already pioneering these methods and building a mass movement. Their use of nonviolent methods was clearly tactical, not a religious faith in its 'moral superiority'. At the same time, numerous secret societies were organized by militants, and training schools were established to prepare guerrilla fighters.

In 1906, the INC held its national congress in Calcutta, a major city in Bengal now in the grips of anti-partition rebellion. The Radicals were in a majority and were able to pass a series of radical resolutions condemning partition and endorsing the boycott and *swadeshi* campaign, against opposition from the Moderates.

By 1907, the Radicals felt confident of being able to gain control of the INC directly. The Moderates, however, were able to manoeuvre and have the location of the congress switched to the city of Surat, where they enjoyed greater support. There, they were able to block many resolutions presented by the Radicals.

In addition, methods used by the Moderates to silence a leading Radical attempting to introduce a resolution led to violent clashes in the congress itself, and



The proposed Bengal Partition, which instigated widespread resistance.

police intervened to restore order. Any pretence of unity in the INC was shattered. The Moderates immediately reconvened the congress and adopted a strict adherence to solely legal and constitutional means, deliberately excluding the Radicals (who stayed away in protest).

At the same time, the British increased their repression of revolutionaries and militants throughout the country, including the Radicals. In 1907-08, a series of new laws aimed at suppression of rebellion were passed by the British, including restrictions on public meetings, press control, trials without jury, and the banning of many groups. Scores of militants were arrested and imprisoned, and some sentenced to death. The repression devastated the Radicals, including those in Bengal.

The anti-partition movement declined by 1909 (by which time the British had decided against the partition, and Bengal was unified as a single province in 1911; the British transferred their imperial headquarters from Calcutta to New Delhi).

In contrast to the repression against the Radicals, the Moderates gained greater negotiating power with the British. In 1907, the British announced new electoral reforms which were greeted with enthusiasm by the Moderates. Two years later when the *Indian Councils Act* became law, however, many of these reforms were no longer part of the act.

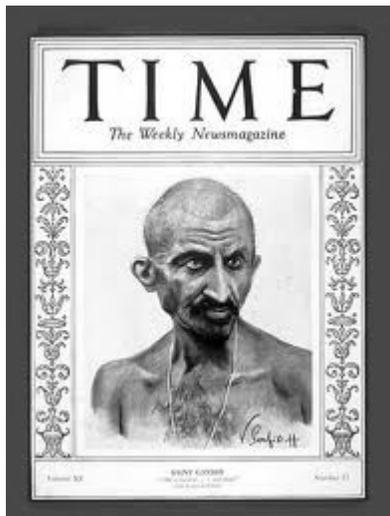
By 1909, membership in the INC had declined, with less than 300 attending its annual congress that year. It was far less active as it pursued legal reforms and was once again dubbed a “private club” for the middle-class. This decline in the INC continued until 1914-15, when some Radical leaders were released from jail (including Tilak). Through concerted negotiations by some INC members, the Radicals finally returned to the INC by 1916 and began to quickly gain control.

“In April 1916, while announcing the acceptance of the compromise formula of the Congress [through which the Extremists re-entered the INC], Tilak and his... allies simultaneously inaugurated the Home Rule League with the aim of “securing swarajya for India.”

“(…) It was now the turn of the Moderates to leave the Congress... as some Moderates feared, the admission of the Extremists into the Congress presaged their loss of control of the organization...

“The Extremists at long last were in exclusive possession of the Indian National Congress. After a decade of intense factional struggle... the Extremists had staged a successful come back that climaxed in their capture of the Congress itself. What made this triumph so noteworthy was the fact that the Extremists had to wage battle on two fronts—one, against the Moderates entrenched strongly inside the

Congress and the other against the colonial regime which used every weapon in the armoury of the state to obstruct the path of the Extremists. However, the triumph of the Extremists did not allow them to enjoy their exclusive possession of the Congress for long. Amidst the turbulence that overtook India in the immediate aftermath of World War I, the Extremists found themselves outflanked by more radical forces headed by a new leader in the person of M.K. Gandhi” (*Indian Nationalism*, pp. 184-86).



Gandhi featured on cover of *Time*.

Another interpretation of the arrival of the Gandhi at this time states:

“At this juncture in Indian history, the younger generation had lost nearly all confidence in the elder statesmen [of the Moderates]... The way was thus clear for a new leader. And Gandhi could not have stepped in at a more favourable psychological moment.”

(*Gandhi: A History*, p. 203)

As noted previously, Gandhi's return to India in 1915 had not been very noteworthy, and his political influence was almost non-existent. As the Radicals gained control of the INC in 1916 and launched a renewed campaign for home rule, Gandhi's fortunes rose considerably through his

involvement in the peasant campaign of 1917, in Champaran.

Gandhi's own account of that campaign shows the support and cooperation he was in fact offered by the regime. After being ordered to leave the area, and then being arrested and pleading his case:

“Before I could appear before the court to receive the sentence, the Magistrate sent a written message that the Lieutenant Governor had ordered the case against me to be withdrawn, and the Collector wrote to me saying that I was at liberty to conduct the proposed inquiry [into peasant grievances], and that I might count on whatever help I needed from officials.

“The country thus had its first direct object lesson in Civil Disobedience. The affair was freely discussed both locally and in the press, and my inquiry got unexpected publicity.”

(*An Autobiography*, pp. 345-46)

At the same time, the British once again moved to repress the militants and Radicals, while promoting the Moderates: “The British Government had been following a dual policy; it set up the Rowlatt Committee to enquire into conspiracies on December 10, 1917, and started negotiations for political reforms” (*History of the Indian Revolutionary Movement*, p. 96).

It is no wonder that many critics of the Gandhian myth point to his constant role as a counter-weight to the revolutionary forces in India, used by the British as a tool of counter-insurgency (that is, as a counter-revolutionary). This strategy was successful to an extent because of the 'radical' posture Gandhi adopted, hijacking the forms of resistance people were already practising and molding it into a strict, religious-based form of nonviolence (and collaboration).

As a result of the dual policy of the British (repressing 'Extremists' while negotiating with Moderates), and the promotion of Gandhi as a national political figure, the INC was again in the hands of Moderates by 1918-19. As history shows, however, this did not mean either Gandhi or his Moderate cohorts in the INC had total control over the people or their movements.

Anti-Colonial Resistance Outside the Congress

Although a national organization, the INC did not include all of India, and its support was stronger in some areas than in others. Many regional movements and struggles arose that were autonomous from the Congress, including armed groups. Some were ethnic based movements while others promoted revolution against both the British as well as their Indian puppets in the colonial administration.

While the initial anti-colonial rebellion was initiated by Indian troops serving in the British Army during the 1857 Mutiny, revolutionary groups did not begin to proliferate until during and after the 1905 Bengal Partition (which was eventually defeated through a diversity of tactics). The main areas they were most active in was the Punjab and Bengal.

The *Jugantar* party emerged in 1906 out of the *Anushilan Samiti*, a revolutionary group concealed as a fitness club. It began collecting arms and ammunition, and sent members abroad for military training. It was involved in numerous attacks on British colonial officials. During World War 1, along with other groups, the Jugantar party attempted to increase armed attacks by smuggling in German weapons and ammunition, but the plot became known to the British. The group was targeted with severe repression, and many of its members were killed or imprisoned.

Among the numerous actions carried out against the British by Indian revolutionaries during this time was the July 1909 assassination of British MP William Hutt

Curzon Wylie, in London, by Mada Lal Dhingra. In 1912, in Delhi, a bomb was thrown at the procession of the Viceroy of India, Lord Hardinge, injuring him and his wife. The targeting of high-ranking colonial officials was a consistent part of revolutionary practise in India (one of the last such attacks to occur outside of India was the killing of Sir Michael O'Dwyer, generally held responsible for the Amritsar Massacre, on 13 March 1940, by Udham Singh in London).



Bhaga Jatin, one of the founders of the Jugantar party, pictured here in 1910.

Another example of an anti-colonial resistance movement outside of the INC was the Ghadar Party:

“The first Indian political organization to call for complete independence from British rule was the *Ghadar* (or *Gadar*) Party, organized in 1913 by Indian immigrants in California... Although Sikhs from Punjab made up the majority of it's founding members, the movement was completely devoid of any trace of regional or religious chauvinism. It's platform was uncompromisingly secular and called for a total rejection of any form of caste discrimination. And unlike the Congress, it's membership was primarily drawn from the working class and poor peasantry. Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindus of all castes (including

Dalits) were welcomed in the movement without bias or discrimination...

“Although the *Ghadar* movement started in California, chapters were established all over the world and by 1916, a million copies of their weekly pamphlet were published and circulated. As the movement grew in strength, there were plans to set up cells of the Ghadar party all over India and thousands of young volunteers attempted to return home and initiate local chapters wherever they could. The British, realizing the dangers posed by this extremely radical movement moved quickly and closed in on the revolutionaries. Hundreds were charged for sedition in the five Lahore Conspiracy Cases. According to one estimate, a total of 145 Ghadarites were hanged, and 308 were given sentences longer than 14 years. Several were sentenced to hard labour in the notorious prison known as *Kala Pani* in the Andamans...”

(“Key Landmarks in the Indian Freedom Struggle,” http://india_resource.tripod.com/freedom.html)

Despite Gandhi putting an end to the official Non-cooperation Movement in 1922 (after the deaths of 21 cops

in Chauri Chaura), resistance against the British continued and more armed groups were formed even as the INC declined, demoralized by Gandhi's abrupt halt to the campaign.

To counter this renewed phase of anti-colonial resistance, the British brought in Sir Charles Tegart, a high ranking British police officer who had been stationed in India since 1901. By the 1920s, Tegart was a leading intelligence officer who worked to repress anti-colonial resistance. He would survive six assassination attempts in India before his transfer to Palestine, in 1938 (where he pioneered various counter-insurgency measures, including the construction of fortified police stations).

In an attempted killing of Tegart in January 1924, Gopimohan Saha mistakenly killed another British citizen. He was captured, tortured, and sentenced to death. Saha's conduct during his arrest, torture, trial, imprisonment, and then execution, were seen as heroic by many Indian revolutionaries. On the day of his execution, Saha wrote on the walls of his cell: "*Bharatiya Rajnikshetre Ahinsar Sthan Nei*" ("Non-violence has no place in India").

At a subsequent meeting of the INC, a resolution was passed praising the courage and self-sacrifice of Saha:

"This created a stir. Gandhi... condemned the resolution in strong terms... There was a prolonged controversy. The British government was quick to take advantage of it. Henceforth, whenever the question of releasing political prisoners came up, the Government released only the satyagrahis [Gandhi's pacifist followers]. And when the Bengal Ordinance, to suppress the revolutionary movement, was introduced, it did not meet with stiff opposition. It was a shrewd move by the British Government... Thanks to Gandhi's attacks on the revolutionaries the country took this step rather calmly."

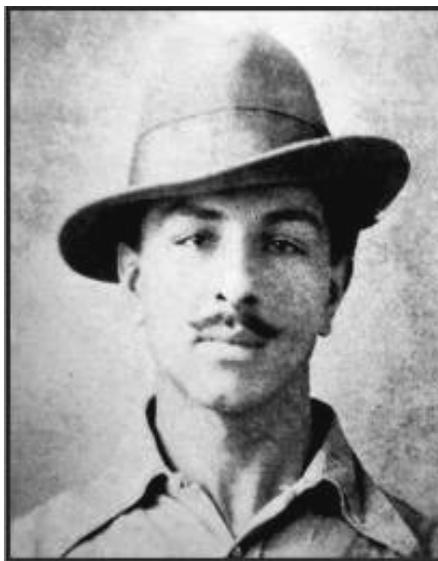
(*History of the Indian Revolutionary Movement*, p. 101)

The next year, however, as over a thousand Indians sat in jail without trial as a result of the Bengal Ordinance, it was widely condemned and even Gandhi had to oppose it. Throughout the 1920s, a large number of armed groups emerged as a consequence of the British repression, particularly the 1919 Amritsar massacre. Some were groups that had survived the repression of the war years. Many were comprised of anarchists, communists, and socialists, inspired by the 1917 Russian Revolution (and then the Irish guerrilla campaign of 1920-22). These included:

- The Hindustan Republican Association, established in 1924 by revolutionaries in northern India (the

Punjab). It advocated armed resistance to force the British out of India. After an attempted train robbery in 1925, some the HRA's key organizers were jailed. In 1928, the group was reorganized and changed its name to the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association. Members continued to carry out armed attacks on colonial officials, and in 1929 two members threw explosives into a government assembly. The group experienced deadly repression and was largely defeated by 1931, when it split into smaller factions that continued armed attacks into 1936.

- *Babbar Akali*, a militant Sikh group established in 1921 in the Punjab after a massacre of several hundred Sikhs engaged in nonviolent protest against corrupt clergy (in the town of Nankana Sahib). The group agitated for anti-British resistance and killed informants and government officials. Babbar Akali ("eternal lion") was active until 1926, when it was largely repressed by specialized police and military units.



Bhagat Singh, anarchist-communist.

Although the British, as well as Moderates in INC and Gandhi, condemned these and numerous other revolutionary groups as "misguided terrorists," their attacks were directed against government, police, and other colonial targets. Some groups numbered in the hundreds or thousands, while many more were smaller conspiratorial groups.

In the mid-1920s, the Revolutionary Party of India published a pamphlet entitled *The Revolutionary*, describing a position on Indian independence shared by many revolutionary groups:

"It is a mockery to say that India's salvation can be achieved through constitutional means, where no constitution exists... This independence can never be achieved through peaceful and constitutional means..."

(quoted in *India and the Raj*, p. 300)

The revolutionary groups, it would appear, enjoyed a high level of popular support despite their demonization and repression by the British, and the attacks against them from the Moderates in the INC. They also had a long history of warrior traditions and culture to draw on. One person who embodied this warrior culture was Bhagat Singh.

Bhagat Singh was a Sikh militant, an anarchist-

communist, who became renown for his revolutionary actions against the British. He was born September 27, 1907, and became involved in the anti-colonial struggle as a youth. He would later join the Hindustan Republican Socialist Association.

In 1928, British police attacked a peaceful rally in Lahore, leading to the subsequent death of a high profile militant, Lajpat Raj. The killing caused widespread anger throughout the country. In retaliation, a month after Raj's death, Singh and three others executed the deputy chief of police (Saunders). During their escape, another officer was killed.

Then, on April 8, 1929, Singh and an accomplice threw two bombs into the government's Central Assembly, where government leaders were debating new repressive legislation. After throwing the bombs, which caused minor injuries, Singh yelled the slogans "Long Live Revolution" and "Down with Imperialism!" They threw leaflets that claimed responsibility for the attack on behalf of the Hindustan Socialist Republic Association (of which Singh was a leader). Although they could have escaped, the two were arrested. It was later proven during court that the two had no intention of causing any deaths; the explosive charges were too small and thrown away from government officials (and not towards them).

The attack made Singh and his accomplice national heroes. Gandhi, along with other high-profile public figures, condemned them. Baghat Singh was sentenced to life imprisonment. Police, however, working with informants and carrying out raids, uncovered evidence of his involvement in the assassination of the deputy police chief, as well as other bomb attacks. A number of others were also arrested.

During the period before the trial, Singh and other prisoners had carried out hunger strikes to secure status as political prisoners. The hunger strikes received widespread publicity and support. In October, 1930, Baghat Singh and many of his co-conspirators were found guilty. Singh and two others were sentenced to death, and they were executed on March 23, 1931. Singh was just 23 years old at the time and became legendary among youth and revolutionary groups. To counter the potential unrest that might follow their funerals, as had occurred with other revolutionaries, the British had the three corpses cut up and smuggled out of the prison. The remains were transported to a remote area and burned.

Even though the INC Moderates had opposed the revolutionaries, including Baghat Singh, and had publicly condemned their actions, upon their deaths the Congress issued a resolution praising Singh in a blatant attempt to capitalize on his death:

"This Congress, while disassociating itself from Bhagat Singh, Anarchist Sikh in India and disapproving of political violence in any shape or form, places on record its admiration of the bravery and sacrifice of the late Sirdar Bhagat Singh and his comrades Sukhdev and Rajguru... This Congress is of the opinion that the Government has lost the golden opportunity of promoting goodwill between the two nations, admittedly held to be essential at this juncture and of winning over to the method of peace the party which being driven to despair, resorts to political violence."

(quoted in *History of the Indian Revolutionary Movement*, p. 129)

In response, the *Bharat*, an Indian revolutionary newspaper, published the following statement regarding the INC's opportunism:

"Here for those who have eyes to see, is an example of the work of those 'disciples of truth' [referring to the Gandhians]. Western demagogues never exploited more cynically individual heroism and the sentiments of the public for their own ends. Bhagat Singh was sung up and down for two days in Congress... the parents of the dead men were exhibited everywhere. Probably their charred flesh, had it been available, would have been thrown to the people... And to cap it all, no uncompromising condemnation of the Government that carried out the act, but a pious reflection that the Government had 'lost the golden opportunity of promoting goodwill between the two nations'."

(quoted in *History of the Indian Revolutionary Movement*, p. 134)

In Bengal, the resistance movement was even more militant than in most other parts of India:

"This vicarious militarism gave a strong military colour to the first outburst of the nationalist movement in Bengal in 1905, and the Bengali revolutionary movement in its ideological inspiration was wholly military. It was at first conceived of as an incipient military uprising."

(quotes Nirad C. Chaudhary, *History of the Indian Revolutionary Movement*, p. 154)

A prominent Bengali revolutionary was Subhas Chandra Bose, a former soldier:

"The first expression of Bose's militarism was seen at the session of the Indian National Congress in Calcutta in 1928. For it Bose organized a volunteer corps in uniform... Mahatma Gandhi, being a sincere pacifist vowed to non-



Report on bomb attack of April 8, 1929.

violence, did not like the strutting, clicking of boots, and saluting, and he afterwards described the Calcutta session of the Congress as a Bertram Mills circus, which caused great indignation among the Bengalis.”

(*History of the Indian Revolutionary Movement*, p. 154)

In 1939, after resigning from the INC (being forced out by Gandhi), Bose was placed under house arrest by the British. In 1941, he escaped and travelled to Nazi Germany. Working with the Axis powers (Germany, Italy, and Japan), he helped establish an Indian Legion, although the Nazis had little confidence in the Indian troops. Bose was transported to Japan by a Nazi U-boat, and in 1943 set up the Indian National Army (INA) with Indian prisoners that had been captured by the Japanese.

The INA were to assist the Japanese in an invasion of India. It eventually grew to a force of some 50,000. The INA fought briefly in India, from March to June, 1944, before being defeated by the British. Many of the INA troops simply deserted.



Indian National Army members surrender to the British, 1944.

“It is common knowledge that Bose's army roused immense, and almost hysterical, enthusiasm among Indians in the last months of the war and those immediately following. The Indian public was determined that Bose's men, who had been taken prisoner by the British Indian Army, should not be punished as traitors... Such trials as were held were turned into farce and a fiasco. Such was the strength of the popular feeling that in order to keep hold of the Gandhian Congress unimpaired, even Gandhi and Nehru came out vehemently on the side of the men of Bose's Army. Gandhi was a pacifist vowed to non-violence, Nehru was an anti-Fascist, and both had forced Bose out of Congress in 1939.”

(*History of the Indian Revolutionary Movement*, p. 155)

Although Bose was prepared to use any means necessary to force the British out, including alliances with fascist regimes,

“Nonetheless, Bose and the Indian National Army eloquently demonstrated that Gandhi did not have a monopoly of ideas as to how India might achieve its independence, nor was their universal acceptance either of his leadership or of his non-violent tactics.”

(*Gandhi*, p. 201)

Some assert that Gandhi's methods actually prolonged the struggle for Independence:

“Although Gandhi's defenders may disagree, not only were Gandhi's ideas on non-violence applied very selectively, they were hardly the most appropriate for India's situation. At no time was the British military presence in India so overwhelming that it could not have been challenged by widespread resistance from the Indian masses. Had Gandhi not called for a retreat after Chauri Chaura, it is likely that incidents such as Chauri Chaura would have occurred with much greater regularity - even increasing in frequency and intensity. This would have inevitably put tremendous pressure on the British to cut short their stay. As it is, British administrators were constrained to send back British troops as soon as possible, because many clamored to return after serving for a few years in India. Had India become too difficult to control, mutinies and dissension in the royal armies would have occurred more often, and the British would have had to cut and run, probably much sooner than in 1947.”

(“Gandhi - 'Mahatma' or Flawed Genius? National Leader or Manipulative Politician?” *South Asia Voice*, October 2002 Online edition)

Gandhi's Religious Pacifism

“For me there is no hope save through truth and non-violence. I know that they will triumph when everything else has failed. Whether therefore I am in the minority of one or I have a majority, I must go along the course God seems to have shown me.”

(Gandhi, quoted in *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience*, p. 16)

“My faith in my creed stands immovable. I know that God will guide me. Truth is superior to man's wisdom.”

(Gandhi, 1924, *Gandhi in India*, p. 62)

“Men say I am a saint losing myself in politics... The fact is that I am a politician trying my hardest to be a saint.”

(quoted in *Gandhi and Beyond*, p. 21)

Gandhi's pacifism was clearly a religious belief. For him, it was the root of an all-encompassing religion

through which human misery, and especially violence, would end. It was not only an Indian concern but, for Gandhi, one of global importance which he approached as a spiritual crusade. Whether or not his followers of today grasp these underlying religious motives, they have certainly adopted his moralistic and authoritarian methods as a means of converting the masses to their belief.

As noted, *satyagraha* was Gandhi's term meaning "truth-struggle", or "soul-force". Derived from *Sanskrit*, an archaic Hindu language, the term invoked religious imagery and purpose. In the Gandhian context, religious faith was fused with concepts of social progress and upliftment. According to some of his modern day followers,

"The genius of Gandhi and the basis for his remarkable success lay in his insistence that religion and politics could not be separated."

(*Revolutionary Nonviolence*, p. 251)

"The Gandhian method introduced a revolutionary new form of fighting against injustice without resorting to violence... It combined the quest for religious truth with the struggle for social justice."

(*Gandhi and Beyond*, pp. 19-20)

Gandhi blended a mish-mash of Hindu and Christian concepts to arrive at his version of a "universal truth," which was embodied in non-violence as a way of life. He drew heavily from Henry David Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience* and other writings, whom he credited as "the chief cause of the abolition of slavery in America" (in classic pacifist style, Gandhi swept aside the widespread violence of the US Civil War and ongoing Black resistance, both of which contributed far more to abolishing slavery than Thoreau's writing).

Gandhi was especially influenced by Leo Tolstoy's Christian pacifist writings, and the two began a brief correspondence before Tolstoy's death in 1910. That same year, Gandhi established the Tolstoy Farm commune, and included Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of Heaven is Within You* as mandatory reading (as well as the Bible and other religious texts).

Along with these Christian influences, there was Gandhi's own religious upbringing under Hinduism, which he had gained a renewed interest in after his stay in London and his association with the Theosophists. He was especially influenced by *Jainism* (a branch of Hinduism that preached strict nonviolence and not harming other life forms) and maintained correspondence with a Jainist priest,

who answered many of Gandhi's questions on religious matters.

Some commentators note that it was Gandhi's Hinduism that formed his views around class. According to the mainstream of Hindu belief, society was divided into four basic classes which were spiritually divined (the concept of *varnashramadharma*): priests, warriors, merchants, and workers. Gandhi's efforts to help the poor was not to liberate them from this class system, but to uplift them and to persuade the upper classes to assist him in this (a paternalistic idea termed 'trusteeship').

In addition, the Hindu concept of *Dharma*, a religious or moral duty, was a main motivator for Gandhi, who often cloaked his activities as a religious crusade, and at times claimed his actions were ordained by God.

In 1906, Gandhi further developed his philosophy of "passive resistance," the use of non-violent civil disobedience to achieve legal and political changes. This

was based on his studies as well as his experience in civil rights campaigns in S. Africa at the time. He could not have been ignorant, however, to the widespread use of boycotts and *swadeshi*, as well as the promotion of noncooperation and passive resistance, then underway in Bengal and other parts of India (led largely by Extremists).

That same year, Gandhi began his practise of celibacy (although he still had a wife), part of his Hindu beliefs that sex deprived an individual of vital energy. Gandhi became

celibate in order to devote more of his time and energy to his religious mission.

Later, in 1908, disliking the weak and negative tone of the term "passive resistance," he began using *satyagraha* to describe it. The term assisted Gandhi in attaching a religious veneer to the movement, which for him was as important as the campaigns for civil rights since it represented his entire philosophy. All this was shaped by his interpretations of Hinduism along with the Christian pacifist writings of Thoreau and Tolstoy, and his experiences in the S. African civil rights campaign.

At the core of this doctrine was non-violence, not just as a protest tactic but as a way of life. It also included a vegetarian diet, no alcohol or drugs, celibacy, and other codes of moral conduct. By following these dictates, the practitioner would achieve the spiritual power necessary to promote peaceful social change. Gandhi promoted it as an inherently superior tactic for social change:

"The satyagrahi's love, dignity, self-suffering, and



Gandhi directing his disciples in India.

endurance were intended to weaken the opponent's anger and appeal to his higher nature. The [pacifists] uncomplaining suffering denied the opponent the pleasure of victory and mobilized neutral public opinion in his support.”

(*Gandhi*, p. 57)

In order to carry out such pacifist means, however, people had to be thoroughly trained (indoctrinated) in Gandhi's doctrine. Thus, the Gandhian philosophy of pacifism would spread, leading to peace and social harmony throughout society. This “inner transformation” was always at the forefront of Gandhi's efforts, and he would often blame the failure of satyagrah campaigns—or violence in general—on the lack of proper training in his methods. Like most priests, Gandhi's blind faith in nonviolence as a form of universal truth, one that he alone possessed, drove him to use authoritarian means by which to impose this truth on others.

Gandhi the Religious Control Freak

“Gandhi aspired as an educated man to instruct, and not simply to lead, the peasantry.”

(*Gandhi*, p. 75)

There is little doubt that, despite his pretence at being an anarchist, Gandhi was a highly authoritarian man who did not hesitate to impose his moral authority over others or use institutional means to do so. His own followers described him as a “slave driver” and an autocrat.

Gandhi frequently attempted to have the INC dictate many of his codes as binding resolutions on members, including the wearing of home-made clothing (*khadi*), mandatory spinning, prohibitions on drugs and alcohol, etc.

After Gandhi shutdown the Rowlatt campaign in 1919, he later sought to explain why it had failed as a nonviolent movement, revealing his mentality as a lawyer but also his belief in systems of control:

“Before one can be fit for the practise of civil disobedience one must have rendered a willing and respectful obedience to the state laws... A Satyagrahi [nonviolent disciple] obeys the laws of society intelligently and of his own free will, because he considers it to be his sacred duty to do so. It is only when a person has thus obeyed the laws of society scrupulously that he is in a position to judge as to which particular rules are good and just and which are unjust...”

(*An Autobiography*, p. 392, Gandhi is writing this in 1927)

There are many other examples of Gandhi's authoritarian beliefs regarding society, as well as his crusades to impose his moral values on others. These

reflected his religious and class views, both of which contributed to his inflated view of the role of a privileged elite in overseeing society:

“Travelling third class on Indian trains during his 1901-02 visit to India aroused in Gandhi indignation at the railway authorities' neglect of traveller's comfort and well-being but also provoked annoyance at the 'dirty and inconsiderate habits' of the passengers themselves. He saw it as the duty of 'educated' men like himself to make a point of travelling third class so as to learn about the masses and so find ways of 'reforming the habits of the people'...”

(*Gandhi*, p. 77)

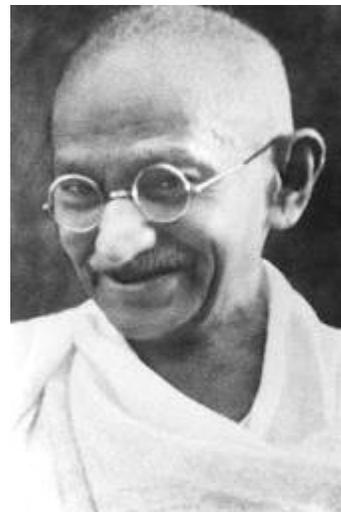
Years later, during the peasant campaign in Champaran in 1917, Gandhi found the lifestyles of the peasants, like those on the trains, in drastic need of improvement. He would write in his autobiography, sounding like a European colonizer:

“The [villagers], he wrote in his autobiography, were 'illiterate'. Their ignorance 'pathetic.' The villages were insanitary, the lanes full of filth, the wells surrounded by mud and stink and the courtyards unbearably dirty. The elderly people badly needed education in cleanliness. They were all suffering from various skin diseases. In order to make the [villagers] more self-reliant and less vulnerable to intimidation, it was necessary to educate them, do sanitary work in the villages and 'penetrate every department of their lives'--in short, to use the language to which Gandhi had become habituated in South Africa, to civilize them. Champaran marked, in effect, the birth of what came to be known as the Constructive Programme.”

(*Gandhi*, p. 86)

One of Gandhi's main concerns, and a reflection of his puritanical views, were his attitudes towards sanitation and hygiene. While there were indeed disease epidemics, including the plague, that swept through communities as a result of their exploitation and impoverishment, Gandhi's prejudices against the poor are evident.

During his time in S. Africa, where he rose to become a political representative of the Indian community, he worked not only to counter the British policies of discrimination, but to prove that Indians were worthy citizens. Writing in 1927 of an example of this:



Gandhi.

“I have always been loathe to hide or connive at the weak points of the community or to press for its rights without having purged it of its blemishes. Therefore, ever since my settlement in Natal, I had been endeavouring to clear the community of a charge that had been levelled against it, not without a certain amount of truth. The charge had often been made that the Indian was slovenly in his habits and did not keep his house and surroundings clean... I saw that I could not so easily count on the help of the community in getting it to do its own duty... At some places I met with insults, at others with polite indifference... Nevertheless the result of this agitation was that the Indian community learnt to recognize more or less the necessity for keeping their houses and environments clean. I gained the esteem of the authorities. They saw that, though I had made it my business to ventilate grievances and press for rights, I was no less keen and insistent upon self-purification.”

(*An Autobiography*, pp. 181-82)

Nor did Gandhi trust the lower classes to conduct themselves accordingly, not without strict rules, education, and the issuing of clear orders:

“Gandhi and his supporters were not prepared to accept the peasants on their own terms, nor did they seek to utilize and validate the peasant's own traditions of resistance and defiance. Rather they sought in their quest for Indian freedom to educate and discipline the peasants, requiring them to follow a strict path of non-violent action and class conciliation. Sacrifice, discipline and self-control were constantly urged upon them...”

“A striking illustration of this occurred... in 1921-2... [when] Gandhi found it necessary to issue to the peasants a series of instructions telling them how to behave...”

“We may not hurt anybody... We may not loot shops. We should influence our opponents by kindness not by using physical force...”

“We may not withhold taxes from the government or rent from the landlord... It should be borne in mind that we want to turn [landlords] into friends... We must abolish intoxicating drinks, drugs and other evil habits. We may not indulge in gambling. We may not tell an untruth on any account whatsoever. We should introduce the spinning-wheel in every home...”

(*Gandhi*, pp. 99-100)

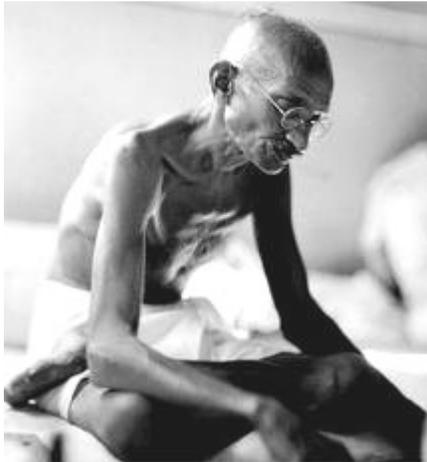
Among the restrictive conditions for his devotees was his demand that they be celibate (*Brahmacharya*). The communes where he and his followers lived, the ashram, were under his total control. To reinforce this, they were

organized as prisons, and the members were referred to as 'inmates' who all wore the same prison style uniform.

Following the killing of the police in Chauri Chaura in 1922, Gandhi expressed his tendency towards totalitarian social control as a means of preventing violence in general:

“Non-violent attainment of self-government presupposes a non-violent control over the violent elements in the country. Non-violent non-cooperators can only succeed when they have succeeded in attaining control over the hooligans of India, in other words, when the latter also have learnt patriotically or religiously to refrain from their violent activities...”

(“The Crime of Chauri Chaura,” in *Gandhi in India*, p. 25)



Gandhi on hunger strike, seen by some as a coercive measure used against political opponents and his own disciples.

These same attitudes can be seen in current pacifist preachers, which reveal a profoundly authoritarian impulse to impose control:

“Within the global justice movement as whole, there has been some reluctance to publicly disavow vandalism and street fighting. It is impossible to control the actions of everyone

who participates in a demonstration, of course, but more vigorous efforts to ensure nonviolence and prevent destructive behaviour are possible and necessary. A 95 percent commitment to nonviolence is not enough. The discipline must be total...

“Movement leaders must insist on an unambiguous code of nonviolent conduct among those who participate in global justice demonstrations...”

“The choice of nonviolence... should not be left to chance. It should be integrated into every action and publicly proclaimed as the movement's guiding principle and method... Only by preserving nonviolent discipline can the movement occupy and hold the moral high ground and win support for the necessary social change.”

(*Gandhi and Beyond*, pp. 150-51)

Although Gandhi frequently resorted to direct commands, he also used other means to gain his way, including hunger-strikes, undermining collective decision-making processes, and citing spiritual reasons for his actions:

“For Nehru [a member of the INC, eventually president, who worked closely with Gandhi], as for many of his associates and adversaries, Gandhi had a disturbing habit of mixing up religion and politics, obscuring what

should have been arrived at logically or through open debate. Instead, his claim that 'my politics are derived from my religion', gave him free rein to follow his instincts and the license to make pronouncements or take decisions on the basis of his conscience or 'inner voice' alone. This forestalled collective decision-making among the Congress leaders..."

(Gandhi, p. 165)

Gandhi's tendency to make unilateral decisions, consulting no one else, was another expression of his authoritarian and elitist approach. The most notable examples include during the 1907 registration movement in S. Africa, the 1919 campaign against the Rowlatt Committee, the one in 1922 for home rule, and again in 1931 with Gandhi-Irwin Pact (following the Salt March).

Gandhi's Commune Cults

Ironically, Gandhi the "anarchist" had a deep appreciation for both military and prison organization—and discipline—as models for his political organizing. This can be attributed to, in part, his religious views and an emphasis on suffering and self-sacrifice, along with his strong authoritarian nature.

An early glimpse of this tendency was seen during the 1906 Zulu rebellion in Natal province, in S. Africa, when Gandhi urged Indians to join the British, "even if only to acquire discipline, no matter if some lives were laid down in the process" (Gandhi: *A Life*, p. 110).

Writing in the *Indian Opinion* in 1906, Gandhi further proclaimed the value of Indians serving in the military:

"The training such men receive cannot be had elsewhere... A man going to the battle front has to train himself to endure severe hardship. He is obliged to cultivate the habit of living in comradeship with large numbers of men. He easily learns to make due with simple food. He is required to keep regular hours. He forms the habit of obeying his superior's orders promptly and without argument. He also learns to discipline the movement of his limbs... Instances are known of unruly and wayward men who went to the front and returned reformed and able fully to control both their mind and their body."

(Gandhi: *A Life*, pp. 109-10)

Perhaps nowhere was Gandhi's controlling nature more evident than in the communes he established, beginning with the short-lived Phoenix Settlement in S. Africa, built in 1904 with the support of wealthy Indian

merchants. The commune consisted of family, friends, and a growing number of followers. They built houses and engaged in farming, carpentry, craft work, and religious study. All under the "unquestioned authority" of Gandhi (whom they referred to as *Bapu*, father).

From the Phoenix settlement, Gandhi continued his law practise while supervising the commune. They began publishing the *Indian Opinion* at Phoenix, having acquired a printing press. But not all members of the commune were fully in agreement with living the 'simple life' and it began to decline.

In 1910, Gandhi established a new commune outside of Johannesburg—the Tolstoy Farm. It had 1,000 acres of land, with forty residents. The land was donated by a wealthy German architect who was one of Gandhi's followers. As in the previous commune (Phoenix), members carried out small-scale farming and craftwork, emulating a small village. They also held daily prayer sessions and the study of religious texts, including the Bible, Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, and the *Bhagavad Gita* (a Hindu religious text). Gandhi termed these communes *ashrams*, meaning a 'spiritual community'.

By this time, Gandhi had more fully developed his religious pacifist doctrine, writing the *Hind Swaraj* (India Home Rule) pamphlet in 1909 which outlined much of his views on independence and nonviolence. While Gandhi's initial forays into jail cells in S. Africa were disturbing, he found they were also highly educational for a middle-class person to go through. The simple food was in contrast to the pampered diet of the privileged. The uniform clothing was rough but practical, and helped instill a sense of equality (other than with the guards and wardens). Prison not only imposed this type of simplicity, it also

enforced cleanliness, good order, discipline, organization, and labour—all activities Gandhi approved of, encouraged, and whenever possible insisted on.

Gandhi, still attached to the ideas of discipline he had expressed in 1906, and now influenced by his brief prison experiences, organized the Tolstoy commune to simulate the routine of prison, including similar uniforms, food, labour, and even shaving their heads. They were referred to as the "ashrami inmates," and in fact part of the rationale for this was to prepare the disciples for any arrest and imprisonment they would experience as a result of civil



Phoenix Settlement in S. Africa, house (top) and building with printing press (below).

disobedience. It was also a convenient means by which to exert near total control over members of what was essentially a cult, including their diet, language, routine, and even sexual relations.

Under Gandhi's control, these commune members formed the core of his campaigns and provided a dedicated, disciplined cadre of professional organizers. It was from these ashram communes that many of Gandhi's nonviolent campaigns were launched, and which served as their organizing base.

Upon his return to India in 1915, Gandhi established a new commune near Ahmedabad, along the Sabarmati river (referred to as the Sabarmati ashram, then later the Satyagraha ashram). Like his previous communes, this one was also set up with the assistance of wealthy Indian merchants. Similar to the other commune sites, it was rough land to live on and to farm. It was from this commune that he would direct and organize civil disobedience campaigns, and also launch the 1930 Salt March (comprised of 78 'inmates' from the ashmar).



Gandhi with his disciples.

Gandhi's Image as a Saint

It was during his time in S. Africa (1893-1914) that Gandhi underwent a profound change in character and appearance, from the sophisticated urban lawyer to the spiritual village *yogi*. This was the result of his brief jail experiences in 1908-09 and his deepening interest in religious and political theories. By 1906 he had taken a vow of celibacy.

In 1911, Gandhi resigned from his law practise to focus on 'nonviolent truth' as a way of life. He altered his appearance by shaving his head, and in 1912 stopped wearing European clothes entirely (wearing instead simple Indian clothing). He would later adopt the white loin-cloth, which would help endear him to the peasant class after his return to India.

During this period as well, the image of Gandhi as a saint-like figure began to be promoted among his circle of religious supporters, aided in no small measure by the appearance of Gandhi himself. His devotees also began addressing him as *Mahatma* ("Great Soul," his real name being Mohandas).

Gandhi's saintly image in India first spread with his involvement in the Champaran peasant movement, in 1917. It had reached a high level by the time the 1920-22 Non-Cooperation Movement occurred, after which it declined (along with his credibility as a political leader). It re-emerged during his 1930 Salt March, and would remain a potent aspect of Gandhi's political influence until his death,

in 1948.

Due to the importance of religion in India, including Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, as well as Christianity and other smaller sects, religious symbols were a common aspect of Indian political movements in the 1920s and '30s. Many politicians cloaked themselves in religion as a means of appealing to the masses. There was also a well established tradition of religious 'holy men' travelling the country and promoting their philosophies.

Gandhi did not pioneer these methods but simply adopted them and, with the assistance of the British regime and middle-class Indians, was able to exert considerable influence over the independence movement. Owing to the largely hostile view towards organized religion in the West, however, modern-day pacifists rarely invoke Gandhi's religious imagery but instead promote their doctrine as simply morally and politically superior. Despite the absence of overt religious appeals, however, the basic religious methods and motivations remain.

Gandhi and Violence

Although he professed pacifist beliefs, and that nonviolence was the only way to truth, Gandhi promoted some forms of violence which he saw as politically expedient (a practise he retained until his death).

In 1899, during the Anglo-Boer War in S. Africa, Gandhi helped organize and lead a 1,000 man contingent of Indian stretcher bearers for the British against the settler rebels. This was one of many efforts Gandhi would undertake to show the loyalty of Indians to the British Empire, and therefore their worthiness of being granted full citizenship.

In 1906, a Zulu rebellion resulted in the deaths of two British officers. As the British began their punitive campaign against the Zulus, Gandhi lobbied for the recruitment of Indians into the military. While the British forces in S. Africa refused to allow Indians as officers, they agreed to employ Indian volunteers once again as stretcher bearers for wounded British soldiers, with Gandhi in command of the unit.

Through his *Indian Opinion* newspaper, Gandhi also urged Indians to support the British counter-insurgency effort.

"He still believed that the British Empire 'existed for the welfare of the world', and he wanted to take this opportunity of demonstrating his loyalty to the Crown... Through the medium of *Indian Opinion* Gandhi

urged the Indians to fight on the side of the British.”
(*Gandhi: A Life*, p. 109)

While Gandhians assert that these views underwent a drastic change from 1906 onward, he continued to advocate violence when it was politically expedient to do so.

During World War 1, several years after formulating his satyagraha doctrine, far from promoting nonviolent resistance to imperial war, Gandhi urged Indians to join the British Army and to fight alongside them, famously articulated in his 1918 “Appeal for Enlistment”, although he noted that he “personally will not kill or injure anybody, friend or foe”:

“In April 1918, after attending the Viceroy's War Conference in Delhi, [Gandhi] undertook to assist the British in their drive to recruit more soldiers for the Indian Army. This, moreover, was at a time when recruitment had become intensely unpopular and when nationalist criticism of the British had reached unprecedented levels... For a dedicated believer in nonviolence to assist in sending Indian soldiers to fight, and quite likely die, far from home in the service of the imperial power must seem inconsistent, if not hypocritical...”

(*Gandhi*, p. 108)

Ghosh was more harsh in his assessment:

“The mahatma who denounced the 'crimes of Chauri-Chaura' [when police were killed] and discontinued the non-cooperation movement in early 1922 for the sake of his creed of non-violence, did not hesitate in 1918 to call for 'twenty recruits from each village' to serve as cannon-fodder to defend the empire.”

(*India and the Raj*, p. 124)

This number of recruits was promoted in Gandhi's macabre recruitment flyer:

“There are 600 villages in Kheda district... If every village gave at least twenty men, Kheda... would be able to raise an army of 12,000 men. The population of the whole district is 700,000 and this number will then work out at 1.7 percent, a rate which is lower than the death rate.”

(*Gandhi: A Life*, p. 230)

Many of Gandhi's followers could not understand why he was now actively recruiting for the British Empire, both in regards to the independence struggle and his professed pacifism. Both of these beliefs were abandoned as Gandhi invoked charges of 'womanly' cowardice and the

need to defend the empire in recruiting speeches:

“There can be no friendship between the brave and the effeminate,' he asserted. 'We are regarded as a cowardly people. If we want to become free from that reproach, we should learn the use of arms.’

“His oft-repeated plea was that the easiest and straightest way to win swaraj [home rule] was to participate in the defence of the empire. 'If the empire perished, with it perishes our cherished aspirations.’”

(*Gandhi: A Life*, pp. 230-32)



Gandhi in the uniform of a warrant officer of the Indian Ambulance Corps. He served during the First War (1918). Note the crown on his sleeve.

The supreme irony was that Gandhi - the apostle of non-violence and peace - urged Indians to enlist as combatants in the British Army. He set up recruitment camps to enlist Indians during the First World War. For his efforts he was awarded the Kaiser-i-Hind (Caesar of India), British India's highest civilian award. Other Indians opposed his war efforts.

Gandhi in uniform in S. Africa, serving the British.

Incredibly, Gandhi asserted that the 'easiest' way to gain 'home rule' was to send Indians to fight and die in a foreign land on behalf of their colonial oppressor. Because if the empire was destroyed they would never achieve home rule! Ghosh observes that,

“It is perfectly clear that Gandhi was consistent in insisting on strict observance of non-violence in thought, word and deed in the struggles of the people against the British Raj

and against the native landlords, princes, and capitalists. But when the interests of British imperialism and of the domestic exploiting classes were threatened, he was never squeamish about the use of violence to defend their interests and never hesitated to reject his creed of non-violence...”

(*India and the Raj*, p. 122)

Ultimately, Gandhi's concept of satyagraha itself relied on some level of violent repression by the state in order to show the moral superiority of pacifism in practise:

“One of the profound ironies of Gandhi's nonviolent tactics was this essential and symbiotic relationship with violence. Non-violence in a non-violent world might achieve little, but in a society ruled through sporadic violence... its impact could be immense. Whether Gandhi ever fully recognized the satyagrahi's paradoxical reliance upon violence is hard to say...”

(*Gandhi*, p. 112)

While calling himself an anarchist and a pacifist, Gandhi promoted the state's monopoly on the use of violence and the necessity of soldiers remaining loyal to the government in order for that violence to be effective.

During the campaign arising from the Salt March, Indian soldiers in Peshawar refused orders by British officers to fire on protesters in April 1930. After their court martial, the soldiers received long prison sentences.

As part of the 1931 Gandhi-Irwin Pact, which

ended the civil disobedience movement arising from the Salt March (1930), the clause on release of political prisoners excluded soldiers that had refused orders to open fire or attack protesters. The clause stated that:

“Soldiers and police convicted of offences involving disobedience of orders... will not come within scope of this amnesty.”

“In reply to questions in October 1931, Gandhi said: ‘The Garhwali prisoners... deliberately disobeyed their orders. I agree that it was a non-violent action on their part, but it was also a gross breach of discipline by those who had taken an oath to carry out the commands of their officers.’ To the mahatma, the Garhwali soldiers ‘crime’ in refusing to carry out an order of the alien rulers to kill and maim unarmed countrymen far outweighed their patriotic act which was among the bravest and most unselfish acts. ‘A soldier,’ Gandhi said to a French journalist, ‘who disobeys an order to fire breaks the oath which he has taken and renders himself guilty of criminal disobedience. I cannot ask officials and soldiers to disobey; for when I am in power, I shall in all likelihood make use of those same officials and those same soldiers.’”

(*India and the Raj*, p. 126)

Yet, earlier that same year Gandhi had made the following comment after he was criticized for failing to press the British for commuting the death sentence of Bhagat Singh (the revolutionary who bombed the legislature):

“You must know that it is against my creed to punish even a murderer, a thief or a *dacoit*... There can be therefore no excuse for suspicion that I did not want to save a brave man like Bhagat Singh.”

(quoted in *Gandhi: A Life*, p. 303)

Gandhi occasionally deviated from his pacifist doctrine and conceded that violence in defending one’s family was justified (as well as for those who lacked the ‘strength’ to be nonviolent). Ghosh questions the rationale of self-defence against an attack on a family, and the large-scale attack carried out by the British against the entire population:

“[Gandhi:] War will always be with us. There seems to be no possibility of the whole human nature becoming transformed... There is real ahimsa in defending my wife and children even at the risk of striking the wrongdoer.”

“If that was his realization, what worth then were his endless sermons that no hand should be raised against the worst wrongdoers—the imperialist oppressors—who brought ruin to the lives of hundreds of millions of men, women and children?”

(*India and the Raj*, p. 136)

Perhaps more disturbing, if that is possible, were Gandhi’s repeated calls for those that had engaged in

militant resistance during his satyagrahas to face British ‘justice.’ Following the disturbances of the 1919 Rowlatt campaign, Gandhi stated:

“If there has been a plot really to wage war against the King or to overthrow the government, let those who are found guilty by a properly constituted court be hanged.”

(quotes Gandhi, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XVI, pages 114 and 117, in *India and the Raj*, pp. 201-02)

Despite all this hypocrisy regarding violence, Gandhi continued to claim he was religiously devoted to pacifism, even more so than the independence of India. In 1921, he stated:

“I do not work for freedom of India. I work for non-violence in the world... I am ready to sacrifice even the freedom of my country for the sake of truth.”

(*Gandhi: A Life*, p. 257)

After his failed attempts to recruit soldiers for the British during WW1, Gandhi came to the realization that the overwhelming majority of those who participated in the nonviolent campaigns did so because they were too afraid to engage in militant, violent, resistance:

“Meanwhile news was received that Germany had been defeated. That recruiting was no longer necessary was a great relief to Gandhi, but he was still irked by the feeling that not one of his Satyagrahis had refused to go to war because of a reluctance to kill—they simply did not wish to die. Writing to Charles Andrews, he observed:

“When friends told me here that passive resistance was taken up by people as a weapon of the weak, I laughed at the libel, as I called it then. But they were right and I was wrong... with the majority it was purely and simply passive resistance that they resorted to, because they were too weak to undertake methods of violence.”

(quotes *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* in *Gandhi: A Life*, p. 232)

What is one to make of Gandhi’s flip-flopping on the question of violence/nonviolence? Gandhi himself provides the answer, a typically contradictory one:

“At the time of writing, I never think of what I have said before. My aim is not to be consistent with my previous statements on a given question, but to be consistent with truth, as it may present itself to me at a given moment. The result has been that I have grown from truth to truth... Whenever I have been obliged to compare my writing of even fifty years ago with the latest, I have discovered no inconsistency, between the two...”

(*Gandhi: A Life*, p. 367)

In 1946, the British Viceroy Lord Wavell, a former military officer, described this exact tendency in Gandhi after a meeting with him:

“Gandhi ran entirely true to form... his line of

thought and action at any given moment and on any particular issue is as unpredictable as ever; he never makes a pronouncement that is not so qualified and so vaguely worded that it cannot be interpreted in whatever sense best suits him at a later stage..."

(*Gandhi: A Life*, p. 415)

Gandhi's Flawed Concepts of 'Resistance'

For many pacifists, the question of how a person should defend themselves against rape is still a difficult one to answer. Some are so extreme that they believe a person should submit to rape rather than use violence (an extension of their promotion of sacrifice and suffering as an ideal). Others claim a potential victim can always use nonviolent methods (even when this is clearly not true).

According to Gandhi, it was the responsibility of the female victim of rape to nonviolently resist, even to the point of death, as if moral superiority alone could stop a violent assault:

"I have always held that it is physically impossible to violate a woman against her will. The outrage takes place only when she gives way to fear or does not realize her moral strength."

(quoted in *Wit and Wisdom*, p. 244)

Inherent in Gandhi's logic is that, ultimately, it is the victim's lack of moral strength that permits the assault to occur (a version of blaming the victim). Again:

"I believe... that no women can be absolutely and simply raped. Not being prepared to die, a woman yields to the wrongdoer. But a woman who has overcome all fear of death would die before submitting to the outrage."

(quoted in *Gandhi on Women*, p. 381)

When confronted with the horror of the Nazi holocaust against Jews (and others), Gandhi's response was similarly unrealistic. In 1938, even as tens of thousands of prisoners were detained in Nazi concentration camps, tortured and killed, Gandhi offered this advice:

"I am convinced that if someone with courage and vision could arise among them to lead them in nonviolent action, the winter of their despair can in the twinkling of an eye be turned into the summer of hope."

(quoted in "Gandhi, Nonviolence and the Holocaust," by Blair B. King, *Peace and Change*, No. 2, April 1991)

Implicit in Gandhi's remark is that the Jews lacked

courage and vision, another variation of blaming the victim for their brutalization. The "summer of hope" did not come until after massive Allied bombing and destruction of German forces into 1945.

In another, far more controversial statement, Gandhi suggested that the Jews in Germany commit mass suicide as a form of protest against the Nazi's genocidal campaign. Although they might all be dead, the Jews would win 'morally'.

Likewise, when Germany invaded Czechoslovakia in 1938:

"Writing in *Harijan* of 8 October 1938, after the Munich Pact had been signed, Gandhi observed that if the Czechs 'had known the use of non-violence as a weapon for the defence of national honour, they would have faced the whole might of Germany with that of Italy thrown in.... to save their honour they would have died to a man without shedding the blood of the robber.'"

(*India and the Raj*, p. 121)

Later, Gandhi offered advice to Britain on how to resist Nazi invasion in a nonviolent way:

"I do not want Britain to be defeated... I want you to fight Nazism without arms... I would like you to lay down your arms as being useless for saving you or humanity. You will invite Herr Hitler and Signor Mussolini to take what they want of the countries you call your possession. Let them take possession of your beautiful island with your many beautiful buildings. You will give all these, but neither your souls nor your minds. If these gentlemen choose to occupy your homes, you will vacate them. If they do not give you free passage out, you will allow yourself, man, woman, and child, to be slaughtered, but you will refuse to owe allegiance to them."

(quotes the *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* in *Gandhi: A Life*, p. 369)

Gandhi's strategy for "resistance" is total submission and even mass suicide, not very effective methods for stopping invasions or genocide. Yet, he claims it will bring a moral or spiritual victory, for the defeated, enslaved, or dead victims.

These types of illogical arguments, common among pacifists, reveal their religious devotion to a doctrine that, when applied to the real world, offers little more than fantasy and wishful thinking. Only by distorting history, erasing other forms of resistance, and ignoring such practical questions as, for example, how people are to defend themselves nonviolently against violent assaults, can pacifists continue to proclaim their method as the most effective.



Gandhi meeting with Mussolini, fascist dictator of Italy, 1931.

II. Martin Luther King and Civil Rights (1955-68)

Martin Luther King was born January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia, to a middle-class family. His father and grandfather were both preachers in the Baptist church, and King was raised to follow in their footsteps. In 1947, he was licensed to preach by his father, whom he worked for as an assistant. He attended college, and then a theological school in 1948.

It was while attending the theological college that King first studied Gandhi, and in 1959 would travel to India to better understand Gandhi's methods. Some of his early advisers in the civil rights movement were members of a pacifist group (the Friends of Reconciliation) that promoted Gandhi's methods in the US.

In 1953, King married Coretta Scott. The next year, he was made pastor of a church in Montgomery, Alabama. He did not know at the time that he would be involved in the emerging civil rights movement and become one of its national leaders.

King has been described as the “Gandhi of America.” He helped popularize Gandhi's nonviolent philosophy, and to introduce its methods throughout the US during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and '60s. King, far more articulate and logical than Gandhi, was able to explain this doctrine without the confusing spirituality of Gandhi, although he maintained its overall religious spirit and practise. Aside from promoting a modernized, Americanized version of Gandhian pacifism, the myth of King and the civil rights movement is also much more widely available and accessible than information on the Indian independence struggle.

The Civil Rights Movement, in turn, had an enormous influence on other social movements that emerged in the 1960s (including the anti-war, women, Indigenous, etc.). The middle-class reformists of these movements have continued to influence social struggles of today in many G7 nations, and perhaps most so in N. America. They also gain influence through state sanction, legitimization, and access to resources (including state and corporate funding).

The Civil Rights Movements is a good case study because this is where the modern strategy of co-optation using funding and state sanction of reformists was really developed.

According to pacifists, King's nonviolent campaign swept aside the racist segregation laws of the US South and ushered in racial equality and civil rights for Blacks. This

mass movement, we are told, mobilized Blacks under the banner of nonviolent civil disobedience to achieve its goals, using boycotts, sit-ins, and peaceful protests. They faced violent repression from police and other racist whites, but maintained their disciplined commitment to nonviolence, thereby achieving both a moral as well as political victory.

In reality, many Blacks did not subscribe to King's message of Christian nonviolence. By 1962, there was growing militancy among Blacks in the South. Many Blacks, including even members of the main pacifist civil rights groups, were armed. This growing militancy erupted in May 1963, with the Birmingham riots. The rioting and protests spread to other cities and

states, and the US government moved to quickly enact greater constitutional reforms. Even as the civil rights campaign achieved its greatest victory in 1964, with the passing of the *Civil Rights Act*, the level of Black militancy and rebellion only increased until it was repressed by a dual counter-insurgency strategy of co-optation and deadly force.



Gandhi's portrait watching over King.

The Civil Rights Movement

The origin of the Civil Rights Movement are traced to the 1954 court case *Brown v. Board of Education*, in which the US supreme court rejected segregated schools as unconstitutional. Frustrated by the unwillingness of state governments to abide by the federal court decision, Black civil rights campaigns emerged, replacing litigation with mass civil disobedience yet firmly entrenched in legal constitutional means.

The background to this new movement are found in the changing socio-economic conditions for Blacks after World War 2. Many returning Black soldiers refused to accept their second-class status, and there were increasing incidents of fights over segregated public spaces, including buses. Blacks in the South were also making some gains politically and economically, despite the severe restrictions placed on them through racist segregation laws.

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white passenger on a segregated bus in Montgomery, Alabama, and was arrested. This began a year-long bus boycott which resulted in victory when the

buses were desegregated. King became involved in the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), an alliance of churches, professional associations of teachers and doctors, political and civic groups, that spearheaded the bus desegregation campaign.

King was elected president of the MIA on December 5 and proved a capable representative, having strong oratory skills and self-confidence to deal with the media. As a newcomer, he was also unaffected by local factionalism and divisions. His powerful charisma also motivated community members, and especially church-goers, to commit to the campaign. King received death threats and had his house bombed during the year-long boycott.

Although King rose to fame through the campaign, and later the SCLC, neither he nor the Baptist preachers initiated the bus boycott. It was at first organized by the Women's Political Council, to which Parks was a member. The council had attempted through negotiations with bus and city officials to desegregate bus seating from 1953-55, to no avail.

Nor was the Montgomery bus boycott the first. Two years prior, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, a bus boycott had occurred that, after seven days, achieved victory. Some cities, such as Atlanta, Georgia, and Mobile, Alabama, had voluntarily desegregated bus seating. Although the MIA members were unaware of the Baton Rouge boycott at first, they would later seek advice on car-pooling and other organizing matters from this previous campaign.

By September, 1955, another bus boycott had also begun in Tallahassee, Florida, initiated by students. Here, the boycott was countered by political manoeuvring by the white elite, who were able to blunt the impacts of the protest.

In Montgomery, the bus boycott continued for over a year. In February, 1956, the MIA launched a lawsuit against Montgomery's segregated buses. The case was decided on June 4, when a US district court ruled that the practise was unconstitutional. This would later be affirmed in a supreme court decision in November. On December 20, 1956, federal injunctions prohibiting segregated buses were served on city and bus company officials, and on December 21, Montgomery's buses were desegregated. One of the greatest impacts of the bus boycott was the economic impact on white-owned downtown businesses, who relied largely on Black customers.

Civil Rights Organizations

The campaign for Black civil rights did not emerge spontaneously in 1955, but was rooted in a long history of Black struggle against white supremacy and slavery. This included escapes, sabotage, attacks on slave owners, murder, arson, rebellion, and armed resistance.

Although slavery was officially ended by the US Civil War in the 1860s, the South was still legally segregated and Blacks remained an oppressed peoples. By the 1900s, this struggle saw the emergence of a number of organizations comprised of middle-class Blacks and whites, who advocated legal constitutional change. Their main focus was civil rights. Some of the national organizations that would be involved in the movements of the 1950s and '60s civil rights campaigns were:

The **National Association for the Advancement of Colored People** (NAACP), established in 1910. As one of the most conservative of the reformist groups, the NAACP had for several decades engaged almost exclusively in legal and constitutional methods. It was the NAACP that had won the 1954 Brown case on desegregated schooling.

The **Congress on Racial Equality** (CORE) was established in 1942 by Gandhian pacifists from the Fellowship of Reconciliation. CORE initiated the Freedom Rides of 1961 and coined the term "nonviolent direct action."

The **Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee** (SNCC) was established in 1960 during the sit-in protests by students. Its main effort was to register voters, but it also organized civil disobedience campaigns. At first it worked closely with the SCLC, but by 1963 was beginning to distance itself. By 1966 it would emerge as a main advocate of Black Power.

The **National Urban League** was founded in 1911 by wealthy Blacks and white philanthropists. It focused on housing and unemployment, and was essentially a social service organization. Although involved in some legal work on housing and locating jobs, the NUL was not an especially active component of the civil rights movement. It would later be the largest recipient of government and corporate funding in the 1960s.



Armed Black slave in revolt, 1800s.

Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 1957

In January, 1957, the SCLC was established during a regional meeting organized by the pacifist Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR). With some 150 delegates from the South, the SCLC's initial mandate was to spread the use of nonviolent resistance against segregation, focusing on desegregating buses. King was elected president (and would remain so until his death in 1968).

Originally titled the Southern Leadership Conference on Transportation and Nonviolent Integration, it added 'Christian' at another meeting a few months later. The decision was made by the mostly Baptist ministers that formed its board, and was rationalized as a means of countering accusations of communism and radicalism (as the NAACP had been subjected to by critics). It also adopted the slogan "To Redeem the Soul of America."

Many of the board and staff members of the SCLC were also members of the NAACP. The SCLC was established to avoid direct public association with the NAACP. Despite its staunch reformism and hostility to direct action, the NAACP was tarnished constantly by right-wing opponents as a 'subversive' radical organization. In Alabama, the group had been declared illegal.

The SCLC also avoided competing with the NAACP by not being a membership organization; the SCLC was set up with affiliate groups, mostly churches as well as civic associations. New church coalitions emerged as affiliated groups, including the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights, and others.

From the start, however, the NAACP was wary of the SCLC and its competition for funds, support and influence. The leadership of the SCLC and its affiliates were primarily Black middle-class professionals. The network would remain mostly urban until the early 1960s, when voter registration campaigns began to extend its network into rural areas. Although it organized support groups in the North, the SCLC was never able to organize successfully outside of the South (as its failed attempts in 1966 would show).

By 1957, King's reputation as a civil rights leader was being reinforced through high profile events and official government sanction. In February of that year, he was featured on the cover of *Time* magazine. In May, a "Prayer Pilgrimage" was organized in Washington, DC, where King addressed a rally of some 25,000. The protest

was the result of a demand from the SCLC for a government meeting to discuss desegregation of schools in the South. A month later, King held a two-hour long meeting with vice-president Richard Nixon. A year later, he would meet with President Eisenhower.

In 1957, the SCLC also began focusing on voter registration. The campaign, dubbed "Crusade for Citizenship," was officially launched on February 12, 1958, when the SCLC organized protests in twenty cities.

Despite the success of the Montgomery boycott, the rising public profile of King, and the beginning of the voter registration campaign, the SCLC was in decline through 1958-59 and would be little more than a "marginal bystander" in the mass movement that would arise in 1960-61.

In 1959, King and his wife, with assistance from Quaker groups, made a month-long tour of India where they studied Gandhi's methods. That year, a reorganization of the SCLC took place. James Lawson, a member of the Fellowship for Reconciliation and a strong advocate of Gandhian pacifism, was brought in to conduct training on nonviolent protest. Nevertheless, the SCLC achieved little success in organizing a mass movement, its proposals for desegregation campaigns targeting other public spaces, such as theatres, motels,

restaurants, etc., did not catch on. Its funding, based largely on church donations, was also in decline. In 1960, King and Coretta moved to Atlanta, which became the SCLC's headquarters.

School Desegregation, 1957

While the Montgomery bus boycott ended in desegregation, and as the SCLC was being established, campaigns were also underway to desegregate public schools in the South. In September 1957, the Arkansas state governor deployed National Guard troops to prevent nine Black students from entering Little Rock Central High School. In response, President Eisenhower federalized the Arkansas National Guard and deployed units of the 101st Airborne to impose desegregation.

On September 9, 1957, the US government passed a civil rights act creating the Civil Rights Commission along with a Civil Rights Division within the Department of Justice.

Student Sit-In Movement, 1960

While bus boycotts were occurring in Montgomery



Coretta Scott and MLK in India, 1959.

and Tallahassee, Black students were also becoming more active during the period 1956-60. In 1958, for example, a "Youth March for Integration" was held in Washington, DC. But the student movement rapidly expanded in early 1960.

On February 1, 1960, four Black students in Greensboro, North Carolina, refused to leave a cafeteria in a downtown department store. Over the next few days, dozens and then hundreds of local students joined the campaign. The student movement then spread to other cities and states, including Virginia, Tennessee, and Georgia.

By the end of the year, some 70,000 Black students had participated in sit-ins and protests, with some 3,600 being arrested and thousands expelled from state colleges, where campaigns for school desegregation began as well. *Time* magazine described the movement as a "non-violent protest the likes of which the US had never seen."

"The sit-ins represented both a revolt against segregation and a departure from the cautious legalism of the NAACP. Yet the students, for the most part, also refused to accept King's leadership or that of the SCLC. It could hardly be otherwise, given SCLC's limited and secondary role in the sit-in movement. However supportive and sympathetic, SCLC's local affiliates found themselves playing second fiddle to the students."

(To Redeem the Soul of America, p. 62)

Instead of gravitating towards the church-heavy SCLC, the students instead began affiliating with the college-based CORE chapters. During an April 15-17, 1960, Southwide Youth Leadership Conference sponsored in part by the SCLC (primarily Ella Baker), students established a Temporary Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (TSNCC). The "Temporary" was quickly dropped, and the SNCC was established as an independent student organization with no formal ties to the SCLC (although the SCLC offered support, it also claimed the student group as a branch, and many SNCC members resented this).

Although more assertive than the SCLC and the NAACP, the SNCC was also committed to nonviolence. One of its most influential leaders at this time was James Lawson, the FOR member, a strong advocate of pacifism who had a more radical analysis of the US system than King and other reformists. Lawson, who gained credibility for his participation in the Nashville sit-ins, called for not just desegregation but "non-violent revolution."

"It was his blunt and radical language, not merely his Gandhianism, that made him so popular... His biting criticisms of the NAACP struck an especially responsive

chord. 'This movement is not only against segregation,' Lawson insisted. 'It's against Uncle Tom Negroes, against the NAACP's over-reliance on the courts, and against the futile middle-class techniques of sending letters to the centers of power'...

(To Redeem the Soul of America, p. 63)

SNCC's incipient radicalism was influenced not only by Lawson, but also a general criticism of the slow constitutional path marked out by the NAACP and, to a lesser extent, that of the SCLC's more cautious approach to direct action (the same criticisms made by 'Extremists' against the Moderates in the Indian National Congress).

Relations between SNCC and the NAACP became more divided as SNCC leaders began publicly criticizing the organization. By this time there were two clear tendencies in the civil rights movement. The NAACP continued to advocate legal and constitutional reforms, while SNCC and others pushed for mass nonviolent protests and mobilizing the masses for more radical social change.

The SCLC took a middle-course, advocating nonviolent protests as a means to pressure government for constitutional legal reforms (similar to Gandhi's emergence in the INC).

Freedom Rides, 1961

On May 4, 1961, members of the Congress On Racial Equality (CORE) initiated the Freedom Rides from Washington, DC. The rides were a campaign to implement a federal law desegregating interstate bus travel. A group of Black and White students, many from northern colleges and universities, were to ride a Greyhound bus through various states to challenge segregation at bus stops along the route.

On May 14, the Freedom Riders were assaulted by racist whites in Anniston, Alabama, in collaboration with local police forces. The bus itself was set on fire. When they arrived in Birmingham, they were again assaulted by a white mob. In Jackson, Mississippi, they were arrested and would spend 40-60 days in jail. CORE continued to organize other Freedom Rides, which contributed to growing tension in the South, and which gained national media coverage. To prevent more violent attacks on what was a federally mandated right of travel, the US government, now headed by John F. Kennedy, sent 400 federal marshals to protect the protesters, and in some states National Guard troops accompanied the riders.

Several hundred persons were arrested during the



Greensboro, NC, 1960 sit-in.

campaign, and in December 1961 the Interstate Commerce Commission issued a ban on racial segregation and discrimination during interstate travel. A contributing factor to the government's role in imposing desegregation was its international image as a beacon of 'democracy and freedom' in the midst of the Cold War, an image badly tarnished by racist segregation laws and civil rights protests in the South.

As with the student sit-in movement, the SCLC became involved in the Freedom Rides but again did not play a central role. In fact, the SCLC was still in decline despite its voter registration work. It lacked a coherent strategy to mobilize a mass base from which to organize.

Despite this, it was able to capitalize on the student and CORE campaigns, and by 1961 had raised some \$200,000, mostly from northern whites. King's high profile, and that of the SCLC's, made it seem as if they were the guiding force behind the 1960-61 movements, and they were able to reap the financial benefits of this false perception.

School Desegregation, 1962

In September 1962, James Meredith, a Black US air force veteran, began a campaign to enrol at the University of Mississippi, a notoriously racist institution. Racist whites, including the state governor, mobilized to oppose his enrolment and the larger issue of school desegregation.

As Meredith attempted several times to enrol, mobs of angry Whites gathered to prevent him entering school grounds. On a final attempt, several thousand Whites rioted and opened fire on police; some 200 people were injured. In the fighting, two people (including a French journalist) were killed.

In response, President Kennedy deployed US Army units to restore control and Meredith began attending classes. The military build-up reached some 24,000 troops. The next year, in 1963, Kennedy again deployed military forces to impose school desegregation in Alabama.

Defeat in Albany, 1961-62

Having been sidelined during the 1960-61 student campaigns, although still maintaining a high profile as a perceived leader of the movement, King and the SCLC embarked on their first real effort at grassroots organizing after the Montgomery campaign, this time in Albany, Georgia.

The campaign was initiated by two local SNCC

workers, who had started with a voter registration drive but soon expanded their plans to a mass protest movement against segregation. They encountered hostility from the local NAACP chapter, but considerable support from the NAACP Youth Council, which had been established in 1961. They also received support from students at Albany State College.

The two organizers convinced six Black organizations in the city to form a coalition, the Albany Movement, established at a meeting on November 17, 1961.

"[I]ts leadership comprised half a dozen preachers and numerous businessmen and professionals—a doctor, a dentist, a realtor, and the only black lawyer in southwest Georgia."

(To Redeem the Soul of America, p. 86)



Freedom Ride bus burns in Alabama, 1961.

The goals of the movement were fair employment, an end to police brutality, and desegregation of train, bus, and municipal facilities. The Movement organized a negotiating committee and planned protests and mass arrests.

On November 22, five Blacks were arrested at the Albany bus terminal, part of the Movement's plan to begin the campaign. At their trial five days later, some 600 protesters marched to city hall on a 'prayer pilgrimage.' There were no arrests, however.

Then, on December 10, a group of Freedom Riders arrived in Albany and were arrested. Two days later at their trial, 265 Blacks were arrested during a protest. The next day, over 200 more were arrested.

On December 15, King and SCLC officials arrived in Albany, invited by the Movement president. During a speech, King announced he would lead a march the next day.

The following day, King led some 250 protesters to city hall, and most were arrested after ignoring an order to disperse. King refused to pay bail, and his arrest and imprisonment attracted widespread publicity.

Ella Baker, now an adviser to SNCC and a bitter critic of the SCLC and King, moved to counter the perception that the SCLC was leading the Albany campaign. At a December 17 Movement press conference, speakers denied the SCLC was in anyway involved in the organizing.

The Movement had also reached a settlement with the city that included the release of all prisoners, compliance with the federal decision banning segregated interstate travel facilities, a committee of city and movement members to continue negotiations, and a thirty-day moratorium on protests.

King was released from jail with instructions to return in the summer for sentencing. The SCLC retreated from Albany, although the movement continued to organize.

In January, 1962, the Albany Movement began a boycott of buses, and in April started carrying out sit-ins of the library and other municipal buildings. These actions only caused minor inconveniences to the public, however. As the months passed, the movement declined, with less and less people willing to be arrested. The long delay in bringing to trial the several hundred arrested in December also limited their enthusiasm for re-arrest. The movement's main success was in boycotting white businesses, some of which complained of an 80-90 percent loss in customers.

Albany chief of police Laurie Pritchett anticipated that upon King's return in July for sentencing there would be a revival of the protests. He began studying the Montgomery campaign as well as Gandhi's doctrine. He planned and prepared for mass arrests, which he saw as being intended to overwhelm the police and fill the jails.

He contacted regional police forces, who agreed to take prisoners, thereby relieving the Albany jail. Over the course of 3-4 months, the Albany police also received training in conducting "non-violent protester" arrests.

As Pritchett had expected, King's return to Albany in July generated considerable excitement. On July 10, King refused to pay a \$178 fine and was sentenced to 45 days in jail. This had a dramatic effect on the local movement and national media. Mass meetings were held by the movement organizers, preparing for a renewed offensive.

Then, on July 12, just two days later, King was released when an anonymous donor paid his fine. At this anti-climactic turn, the movement fizzled with no strong point around which to rally. King decided to be re-arrested, but a federal court injunction given to the city banned all protests. Because it was issued by a federal court, which King saw as an asset since it had passed legislation enforcing civil rights, King refused to disobey the injunction (to the dismay of Movement members).

A few days later, however, on July 24, 1961, the injunction was overturned on appeal. Later that night, King led a rally:

"When a group of forty marchers set off towards city hall at the end of the rally, a crowd of black spectators, perhaps two thousand strong, followed the line of march and, according to the police report, began 'chanting, harassing, and intimidating' the officers. A smaller group broke away from the main body and ran into the street, forcing cars to swerve. When Pritchett ordered his men to

disperse the crowd, 'police officers were met with a volley of rocks and bottles and other objects.'"

(*To Redeem the Soul of America*, p. 104)

In response, King suspended the protests and called for a day of "penance" (as Gandhi had done). The next day, he toured the main Black district with a small entourage, stopping at a pool hall, a shoeshine store, a drugstore, and a bar, preaching nonviolence.

On July 27, King and nine others were arrested once again during a rally. By this time, the numbers of people attending protests had dwindled significantly. On August 10, 1962, the Albany Movement suspended the campaign, and all prisoners were released, including King.

Albany remained rigidly segregated. Even when official segregation laws were repealed, city officials and police maintained an informal segregation policy, simply threatening Blacks with other, unrelated, charges.

The defeat of the Albany campaign has been attributed to various factors. These include an overly ambitious set of goals to start with, and then the beginning of actions as negotiations were underway. The involvement of the SCLC and King in the movement had been disruptive, but for the SCLC it showed the need for having a stronger local office in such efforts. By attempting to revive the movement in July, 1961, they had also attached themselves to a weak and divided local leadership.

There were other lessons as well:

"Albany disabused King [and others] of their romantic notions about nonviolent direct action. The concept of a 'nonviolent army' that could steamroller the opposition through sheer weight of numbers turned out to be highly unrealistic. Albany demonstrated that no more than five percent of a given black population could be expected to volunteer for jail. SCLC had to frame its tactics accordingly... People who were arrested once proved extremely reluctant to risk a second arrest... The Birmingham campaign, the SCLC decided, should start with small-scale protests and gradually build up to mass demonstrations and jail-ins..."

(*To Redeem the Soul of America*, pp. 107-08)

Also in 1962, the Kennedy administration introduced the Voter Education Program, with substantial funding for civil rights groups to direct them towards voter registration campaigns—to get the movement off the streets and divert it into electoral efforts. Once Blacks were organized to vote, according to government officials, "freedom" would come much more easily.



MLK with Albany police chief Laurie Pritchett, 1962.

SCLC's Birmingham Campaign, 1963

Birmingham, Alabama, was renowned for its racist violence and deeply entrenched white supremacist beliefs. The local KKK presence was strong, and civil rights advocates as well as Blacks in general were frequent targets for violence. Bombings were so frequent that some referred to the city as "Bombingham." In addition, the chief of police, Eugene 'Bull' Connor, was a strident white supremacist who ruled the city's streets with fear and violence.

The local SCLC affiliate was the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR), established in 1956, with Fred Shuttlesworth as the president. It was the most active of the SCLC's affiliates, with some 600 members.

The SCLC and the ACMHR began planning the Birmingham campaign in September 1962, after the defeat in Albany and incorporating lessons from that struggle. One of these was to limit the campaign to a single issue. For Birmingham, this would be the 'especially hated' lunch-counter segregation. Downtown businesses would be the primary targets.

Organizers had first planned to target the Christmas shopping season, but this was abandoned when negotiations led to some concessions by city and business owners, who feared the potential disruption of protests. This fell apart, however, when Connor threatened to arrest business owners who desegregated their premises.

The SCLC-ACMHR renewed their organizing efforts, planning on targeting the Easter shopping season. Organizers collected the names of 300 people willing to go to jail, and many more who volunteered their help in various committees (telephone, transportation, jail visits, food, etc.). A local millionaire, A.G. Gaston, provided rent-free organizing space in his motel as a headquarters. Harry Belafonte, a well known Black singer, also contacted wealthy friends in New York and Los Angeles to contribute money. The Gandhi Society, established by a wealthy corporate lawyer (Harry Wallatch), was tasked with legal and financial support.

Reconnaissance was conducted of downtown businesses, and several were selected within a two-block radius of one another. Meanwhile, King stepped up his fund-raising efforts (for legal expenses, the greatest cost of such campaigns) and public appearances. His main effort was to persuade the federal government to take a firm stand in favour of civil rights, instead of trying to appease two opposing sides.

To create pressure on the Kennedy administration,

King needed a sensational confrontation. Accordingly, 'Project C' (for confrontation) was the name given to the SCLC's Birmingham efforts.

On April 3, 1963, the Birmingham campaign began with 20 Black volunteers carrying out sit-ins in a number of downtown stores. Although the public response was minor at first, it outraged many local Black citizens, particularly other middle-class Blacks, who called the direct action "provocative" and badly timed.

Most Blacks were unaware the protests would begin, with the SCLC and ACMHR having carried out their preparations with as much secrecy as possible. King delayed his own arrest in order to rally the community into supporting the boycott, understanding that most would not volunteer to be arrested. On April 6, the first marches were carried out, despite being prohibited. Connor's police used restraint and calmly arrested 43 protesters.

The next day, barely two dozen protesters attempt to march to city hall from a Baptist church, but were arrested after just two blocks. A large crowd of onlookers had gathered, however, unattached to the official march:

"More than a thousand spectators... gathered along the route. Angry and disappointed to see the marchers arrested after walking but two blocks, they milled about and hurled abuse at the police. One youth

poked at a police dog with a lead pipe. An altercation broke out which took fifteen policemen, with dogs, to quell. The incident quickly blew over, but it taught Walker [an SCLC organizer] two valuable lessons. First, by delaying the marches until late afternoon he ensured that a large number of onlookers congregated around the church. A confrontation was much more likely to occur between the police and the spectators than between the police and the demonstrators. Second, many of the newsmen had described the spectators as 'demonstrators,' implying that they were part... of SCLC's protests. 'We weren't marching but 12, 14, 16...' Walker admitted. 'But the papers were reporting 1,400.'"

(To Redeem the Soul of America, p. 121)

The SCLC organizers exploited the incident, pointing out especially the use of dogs. Over the next few days, Connor did not repeat the error. On April 10, another small protest with just 30 participants were arrested without conflict.

On April 12, Good Friday, King himself was arrested along with others. King's arrest attracted widespread media publicity, which the SCLC spokespersons used to pressure the federal government to become more directly involved. President Kennedy phoned



Eugene 'Bull' Connor, chief of police.

King's wife, Coretta, indicating official concern and interest in the case.

During his imprisonment, King wrote "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," which was distributed after his release on April 20. Despite the media attention, by the end of the month the numbers of volunteers for jail had declined again. The lack of volunteers, in fact, threatened the ability of the movement to continue its protests.

At this time, some organizers advocated mobilizing youth into the protests. Reportedly, King and others were opposed, but some organizers took it upon themselves and distributed leaflets at local high schools calling for a march on May 2.

Several thousand Black students rallied that day at city hall, with some 600 being arrested. Following this, as many as 1,000 students a day gathered and marched. Some organizers began using diversionary tactics, including false alarms and diversionary marches, to spread out the police and fire trucks. They also acquired walkie-talkies.

On May 3, Connor deployed dogs and fire-hoses on protesters in an effort to disperse them, and the sensationalistic images were broadcast across the country. The imagery of dogs viciously attacking protesters was highly incendiary.

Over the next three days, hundreds more students were arrested in daily marches. By May 4, the head of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division had arrived in the city, with the government increasingly concerned over an impending crisis. On May 6, over 1,000 students were arrested. The city's jails were overwhelmed. Then, on May 7, with the downtown area packed with protesters, rioting broke out.

Throughout most of the campaign, King and Shuttlesworth, the local SCLC affiliate president, had coordinated and cooperated together. On May 7, however, as the streets filled with protesters and Shuttlesworth was injured by fire hoses, King met alone with negotiators and agreed to a settlement that conceded little but which promised further negotiations.

When Shuttlesworth learned of a press conference to announce this, he opposed it and insisted on a 24-hour stoppage to protests, not a permanent one, while negotiations continued. Major department stores were to hire at least one Black employee, and lunch counters were to begin desegregated service in ninety days. Because the city refused to release the prisoners as part of the deal, the Kennedy administration appealed to the United Auto Workers to pay their bail money, since the SCLC was unable to (the UAW had a large Black membership and was generally supportive of the official civil rights groups). On May 10, an agreement was finally announced.

"What had the protests achieved? The *New York Times* thought the pact 'won for the Negroes at least the promise of concessions.' *Time* less charitably, described it as 'a fragile truce based on pallid promises.' Later assessments were generally negative. Joanne Grant, who reported the campaign for the *National Guardian*, saw the agreement as a typical and unfortunate example of the SCLC's modus operandi: King 'shot the Birmingham movement down with his usual technique of coming in, being the big wheel... and settling for a lot less than even the moderate demands'... In calling the settlement a triumph, wrote biographer Jim Bishop, King lied either to the public or to himself. According to one of the most widely read texts on black history, SCLC won 'token concessions that were later not carried out.'"

(*To Redeem the Soul of America*, p. 129)

The SCLC's Birmingham campaign, largely celebrated as the ultimate victory of nonviolent civil disobedience, failed to achieve its demands. On the other hand, as a demonstration of the power of a diversity of tactics, the Birmingham people's movement instigated a mass

rebellion across the country, that would send the white ruling class into shock and panic.

Birmingham Riots and 'Black Fury'

Often erased from pacifist history, militant Black resistance arose alongside King's nonviolent movement and threatened the state with greater rebellion and unrest. Although there is no doubt the Civil Rights Movement contributed to this growing rebellion, it was the potential for greater violence that forced the federal government to enact reforms:

"In the spring of 1963, Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birmingham [Alabama] campaign was looking like it would be a repeat of the dismally failed action in Albany, Georgia (where a 9 month civil disobedience campaign in 1961 demonstrated the powerlessness of nonviolent protesters against a government with seemingly bottomless jails, and where, on July 24, 1962, rioting youth took over whole blocks for a night and forced the police to retreat from the ghetto, demonstrating that a year after the nonviolent campaign, black people in Albany still struggled against racism, but they had lost their preference for nonviolence). Then, on May 7 [1963] in Birmingham, after continued police violence, three thousand black people began fighting back, pelting the police with rocks and bottles. Just two days later, Birmingham—up until then an



Birmingham May 3, 1963: police dogs & fire-hoses are used on crowds.

inflexible bastion of segregation—agreed to desegregate downtown stores, and President Kennedy backed the agreement... The next day, after local white supremacists bombed a black home and a black business, thousands of black people rioted again, seizing a 9 block area, destroying police cars, injuring several cops (including the chief inspector), and burning white businesses. A month and a day later, President Kennedy was calling for Congress to pass the Civil Rights Act, ending several years of strategy to stall the civil rights movement. Perhaps the largest of the limited, if not hollow, victories of the civil rights movement came when black people demonstrated they would not remain peaceful forever. Faced with the two alternatives, the white power structure chose to negotiate with the pacifists..."

(How Nonviolence Protects the State, p. 12)

Compare this account of the Birmingham campaign to that promoted by pacifists:

"The Birmingham campaign got underway with a series of demonstrations and sit-ins in early April 1963. As the marches spread, hundreds were arrested, including King..."

"As the weeks passed and the number of arrested climbed (eventually surpassing 2,600), the campaign strategy seemed to be foundering. Connor [the police chief] had not yet been provoked into overreaction, and the numbers of people willing to face arrest began to dwindle. In a bold escalation of tactics, organizers called on school children to join the marches. Hundreds of students eagerly responded and, like other demonstrators, were promptly hauled off to jail... Their presence was the straw that broke the back of Connor's patience. On Friday, 3 May, as hundreds of students and other demonstrators approached Kelly Ingram Park near downtown, Connor unleashed police dogs and fire hoses, and a gruesome display of police brutality unfolded before television news cameras... This was a decisive turning point in the Birmingham campaign, and indeed the entire civil rights movement. It led quickly to a negotiated agreement in Birmingham and prompted the Kennedy administration to begin work on a national civil rights legislation..."

"The media strategy was a brilliant success locally and nationally. The images of disruption and mass protest contributed to the crisis atmosphere in the city..." *(Gandhi and Beyond, pp. 141-43)*

Nowhere is there any mention of the two nights of rioting, which significantly added to the disruption and "crisis atmosphere" in the city. This is a classic example of

pacifist revision of history in order to promote their doctrine.

While the boycott was undoubtedly successful in that it deprived racist white store owners of profits, the rioting did more than this—it destroyed substantial amounts of their property (the businesses themselves were targeted by rioters). It also threatened even greater escalations in violence, with an angry, hostile, militant resistance having now manifested itself.

Yet, this is of no concern to the pacifists, precisely because it contradicts the belief that the Birmingham victory was entirely the result of nonviolent protest:

"The Birmingham campaign was a dramatic victory, brought about by the heroic sacrifice of thousands of local citizens and by the development and implementation of wise strategy."

(Gandhi and Beyond, p. 144)

Nor was the Birmingham rebellion the only manifestation of a new militancy:

"Across America black fury had broken loose. A swirl of protests, touched off by weeks of racial strife in Birmingham, Alabama, now engulfed much of the country. Between May and late August of 1963, there had been 1,340 demonstrations in over 200 cities in thirty-six states. Some were communities long fractured along racial lines. Others had never before been touched by violence. In

Cambridge, Maryland, a once-tranquil cannery town... the governor declared martial law in July after black rioters shot and wounded five whites, including two National Guardsmen..."

"But angry street protesters were not the only problem, Henderson [a black Justice Department employee] continued. The feeling among leading ministers was that 'they should stop preaching nonviolence'..."

"In Chicago, blacks rioted through the south side in late May after a white police officer shot a fourteen year old black boy..."

"The violence was unrelenting and continued deep into the summer. The very randomness of the unrest made it all the more frightening. In August, protesters in Philadelphia... fought pitched battles with riot police. The violence was especially shocking because the demonstrations were sponsored by the NAACP, traditionally one of the more restrained national civil rights groups. 'My basic strength,' boasted Cecil Moore, the head of the organization's local chapter, 'is those 300,000 lower-class guys who are ready to mob, rob, steal and kill.' For Moore, the strategy of nonviolent protest had run its course..." *(The Bystander, pp.1-2)*.



Birmingham riot, May 1963.

Immediately after the May 7 rioting, King and an entourage visited pool halls and canvassed Black communities, appealing for peace and shepherding people off the streets of Birmingham. All protests had been cancelled. But it was too late—the genie was out of the bottle. The Black rebellion emanating from Birmingham sent shock waves across the country and terrified the white ruling class:

“Anxious voices made themselves heard within the Kennedy administration. Secretary of State Dean Rusk described the racial flare-up as ‘one of the greatest issues that we have had since 1865’ [the US Civil War]. His assistant G. Mennen Williams, the former governor of Michigan and a longtime advocate of civil rights, feared a complete breakdown in law and order: ‘the possibility that the inter-action of fervent demonstration and brutal repression would reach such a pitch that public peace and safety would be endangered beyond reasonable control.’ Berl Bernhard, the staff director of the US Civil Rights Commission... believed the nation was ‘torn by racial insurgency.’

“During a tense meeting at the White House nine days later, Robert Kennedy [US attorney general] warned the president that ‘Negroes are now just antagonistic and mad... You can’t talk to them... My friends all say the Negro maids and servants are getting antagonistic.’ Bruce Marshall, Robert Kennedy’s most trusted Justice Department colleague, compared the recent outbreak of violence with past crises in Alabama and Mississippi. ‘There we had a white mob against a Negro,’ he noted, with sharp clarity. ‘Here we have a Negro mob against whites.’”

(The Bystander, pp. 3-4)

Robert Kennedy later stated:

“There is obviously a revolution within a revolution in the Negro leadership,’ he reflected in 1964. ‘We could obviously see the direction of... King going away from him to some of these younger people, who had no confidence in the system of government.’ It was essential, he thought, to ensure the confidence of the black population...”

(To Redeem the Soul of America, p. 136)

For the presidency of John F. Kennedy, civil rights instantly became the number one issue in the country. After having delayed any substantial constitutional reform on civil rights since the supreme court decision of 1954, and nearly 10 years of nonviolent civil disobedience, by May 22 the President was ready to push through Congress a civil

rights act meeting many of the demands of the reformist civil rights groups.

On June 9, 1963, speaking at a conference of US mayors in Honolulu, Kennedy warned that “the time for token moves and talk is past.” During his televised address to the country, June 11, 1963, he stated the situation bluntly:

“The fires of frustration and discord are burning in every city, North and South, where legal remedies are not at hand. Redress is sought in the streets, in demonstrations, parades, and protests which create tensions and threaten violence and threaten lives...”

(The Bystander, p. 423)

But the government’s effort to bring the people off the streets and into the meeting rooms failed. Anger again flared after Medgar Evers, an NAACP organizer



Medgar Evers, NAACP organizer in Mississippi, killed in June 1963.

in Mississippi, was shot and killed, in June 1963:

“The escalation of violence prompted G. Mennen ‘Soapy’ Williams, the assistant secretary of state, to issue the direst of warnings on June 15 [1963]. ‘We still have a situation of crisis proportions,’ he cautioned the president. ‘The grass roots of the Negro population is clearly aroused... Unless there is a satisfaction of the legitimate Negro aspirations the situation will be fraught with danger... Temporizing will only lose the confidence and support of the responsible Negro and give the extremists... a chance to seize the initiative’...”

(The Bystander, p. 425)

In regards to the protest movement that swept the South following the May 1963 Birmingham riots,

“King’s involvement was slight... and staff member[s]... acted as roving plenipotentiaries [an official with total authority], alternately troubleshooters and troublemakers... In many cases, however, SCLC was playing second fiddle to SNCC or CORE. Even in Savannah, it’s most successful campaign, SCLC’s role was mainly supportive, the energy and drive coming from a largely independent local organization. Critics began to question the SCLC’s effectiveness. It seemed to specialize in “a few showy projects,” leaving to others the arduous, painstaking, and unspectacular job of organizing the black community.”

(To Redeem the Soul of America, p. 142)

In fact, the Savannah campaign, where the local Chatham County Crusade for Voters had initiated a campaign against segregation, was another example of the strength of diversity of tactics involving militant resistance.

Beginning in June 1963, the movement saw extensive mobilizations of thousands on a near daily basis for six weeks.

Local organizers began holding night marches, which attracted plenty of youth and significantly raised tensions. Confrontations began to occur between the protesters and police and National Guard soldiers. On July 11, rioting broke out; the National Guard fired tear gas while rioters threw stones, smashed windows, and started fires. The County Crusade group called off the rallies, and business owners were now willing to negotiate. A plan for desegregation of hotels, theatres, bowling alleys, and other public spaces was made, to take effect October 1. The Crusade called off rallies for sixty days.

By this time, it was clear that King and the doctrine of pacifism were not widely accepted by large numbers of those that participated not only in the protests, but also the rioting and clashes that began to escalate. At the same time, the 'nonviolent' reformists were clearly using the potential and practise of militant resistance to force negotiations with officials.

As rebellion began to spread across the country that spring and into the summer, reformist pacifists attempted to reinforce party discipline. Within the civil rights movement, the call by the main reformist organizations for nonviolence and calm were strongly rejected:

"The NAACP annual convention held in Chicago from July 1 to July 6 [1963] provided stark evidence of the angry mood of black activists... The Reverend J.H. Jackson... was chased off stage when he signalled his opposition to plans for the March on Washington. Even James Meredith received a hostile reception after delivering a speech attacking the indiscipline of black youth leaders.

"At the CORE convention in Dayton, Ohio, held June 27-30, activists belittled the White House bill, bemoaning its failure to tackle police brutality... southern delegates warned black volunteers were arriving for mass meetings and demonstrations armed with knives and revolvers.

"The civil rights movement had been completely transformed over the course of only a few weeks. Prior to Birmingham, black protesters tried to project an air of respectability by wearing suits and ties, and neat dresses; by midsummer jeans and T-shirts had become the uniform of the street. Once orderly picket lines, where smoking and talking was often banned, became raucous affairs, with singing, clapping, and chanting. Many direct-action campaigns now involved civil disobedience---protesters forced themselves under the wheels of police cars, chained

themselves to buildings, and resisted arrest by falling to the floor rather than willingly being taken into custody... Reflecting on the sudden rise in membership and the addition of twenty-six new affiliate chapters, Farmer noted how new recruits were attracted 'by CORE's militancy rather than its nonviolent philosophy.'"

(The Bystander, pp. 429-30)



1963 March on Washington.

On June 19, 1963, the Civil Rights Act was rushed into Congress for debate (it was passed a year later). By this time, a massive March on Washington was called for. Along with announcing submission of the Civil Rights Act, the Kennedy administration then moved to align itself with the reformist civil rights movement and co-opt both the march and the movement itself.

The 1963 March on Washington

The March for Jobs and Freedom occurred on August 28, 1963. An estimated 250,000 people participated in the afternoon rally, organized by a coalition of six main civil rights groups, working closely with the President's office and Washington police. With substantial fund raising efforts, some 21 trains had been chartered, along with 2,000 buses. The rally was held just four months after the rioting in Birmingham, and the situation in many areas was volatile, including northern cities.

Neither Malcolm X, nor the Nation of Islam (which he was a member of at the time, and which he had helped build up to some 25,000 members), were permitted to attend by the rally organizers. Malcolm dubbed the march the "Farce on Washington."

Later, in November during a talk in Atlanta, he delivered his "Message to the Grassroots," a highly acclaimed speech that defined the difference between the reformists and the emerging resistance. In the speech, Malcolm commented on the state's co-optation of the March on Washington, an example of how co-optation occurred on a larger scale:

"It was the grassroots out there in the street. It scared the white man to death, scared the white power structure in Washington, DC, to death; I was there. When they found out this black steamroller was going to come down on the capital, they called in... these national Negro leaders that you respect and told them, "Call it off." Kennedy said, "Look, you are letting this thing go too far." And Old Tom [a term for a sellout or collaborator] said, "Boss, I can't stop it because I didn't start it." I'm telling you what they said. They said, "I'm not even in it, much less at the head of it." They said, "These Negroes are doing

things on their own. They're running ahead of us." And that old shrewd fox, he said "If you all aren't in it, I'll put you in it. I'll put you at the head of it. I'll endorse it. I'll welcome it..."

"This is what they did at the march on Washington. They joined it... became part of it, took it over. And as they took it over, it lost its militancy. It ceased to be angry, it ceased to be hot, it ceased to be uncompromising. Why, it even ceased to be a march. It became a picnic, a circus. Nothing but a circus, with clowns and all..."

"No, it was a sellout. It was a takeover... They controlled it so tight, they told those Negroes what time to hit town, where to stop, what signs to carry, what song to sing, what speech they could make, and what speech they couldn't make, and then told them to get out of town by sundown."

(quoted in *How Nonviolence Protects the State*, p. 26)

Indeed, the protesters scheduled activities were strictly controlled, pre-made and government-approved placards were distributed, and speeches were censored by the White House for any references to militant resistance. At the conclusion of the event, organizers immediately moved to disperse the rally under controlled conditions.

The threat of a mass mobilization of Blacks in Washington DC also prompted one of the largest domestic security operations in that city's history:

"The FBI responded by mounting a vast surveillance operation. The bureau instructed every field office across the country to provide intelligence on how many local black activists planned to converge on Washington, whether they had any affiliation with communist organizations, and if hate groups, like the KKK, planned to sabotage them... [Washington chief of police] Murray mobilized 1,900 of his... officers... He also drafted in hundreds of additional officers from neighbouring suburban forces, who had attended specially organized riot training courses..."

"Since 1,900 officers alone would be incapable of quelling an unruly crowd of some 200,000 blacks, 2,400 National Guardsmen were sworn in as 'special officers' on the eve of the protest and granted temporary powers of arrest..."

"Life in Washington was completely disrupted in the run-up to the march. Government offices shut down, and federal employees were advised to stay home. Acting under recently acquired emergency powers, the commissioners issued a 24-hour ban on the sale of alcohol..."

"Fears about the violent potential of the march brought about an unprecedented degree of cooperation between the administration and black leaders. Bayard

Rustin, who... was in overall charge of its planning, agreed immediately to bring forward the start time of the march so that protesters would not be left wandering the streets after dark. Rustin also promised Justice Department officials that 'there would not be any stunts or efforts to obstruct traffic, such as laying down in the streets, sit-ins or other activities which might irritate or inflame others.' Under intense pressure from the Kennedy administration... Rustin also agreed to a change in venue. The original plan, for a mass protest on the steps of the US Capitol, was quietly shelved. It was replaced with a demonstration at the foot of the Lincoln Memorial, a 180-acre site that was easier to police."

(*The Bystander*, pp. 6-7)

"Even after weeks of meticulous planning, administration officials could not rule out the threat of violence. So on march day itself, the District of Columbia was placed under virtual martial law, with the president ordering the biggest peacetime military buildup in American history. By mid-morning

on August 28, five military bases on the outskirts of the capital were bursting with activity—a heavily armed, 4,000-strong task force... prepared for deployment... At Fort Bragg, North Carolina, 15,000... troops... were placed on standby, ready to be airlifted at the first sign of trouble."

(*The Bystander*, p. 7)

Reporting on the March on Washington, Russel Baker, of the *New York Times*, echoed Malcolm's description of the event: "Instead of the emotional horde of angry militants that many had feared, what Washington saw was a vast army of quiet, middle-class Americans who had come in the spirit of the church outing."

(*The Bystander*, p. 436)



Malcolm X.

Inside the March: The Pacifists and the President

To show that Malcolm is not alone in his assessment of the March on Washington, the following text is from www.whitehousehistory.org and is entitled "JFK, A. Phillip Randolph, and the March on Washington" (retrieved April 2010).

On June 21-22, 1963, President Kennedy met with leaders of the main civil rights organizations, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Urban Negro League, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). When

it was announced that a March for Jobs and Freedom was to be held on August 28, Kennedy requested that the June 22 meeting be used to discuss the march.

Note: Subtitles not in original article, footnote numbering revised for excerpt.

“Boss, I can't stop it because I didn't start it”

“Whitney Young of the National Urban League asked Kennedy at one point in the exchange of ideas if he was opposed to the March on Washington. Kennedy told him he thought it was a big mistake to announce the march before the bill had even been sent to committee, then added, “We want success in the Congress, not a big show on the Capitol.”[1] A. Philip Randolph [the main organizer of the march, a long-time Black civil rights activist *] took the other side, telling him, “The Negroes are already in the streets,” referring to more militant black groups who were less inclined to embrace the nonviolent strategies of seasoned leaders.

“If they are bound to be in the streets in any case is it not better that they be led by organizations dedicated to civil rights and disciplined by struggle rather than to leave them to other leaders who care neither about civil rights nor non-violence?” he asked. Then he added, rather ominously, “If the civil rights leadership were to call the Negroes off the streets, it is problematic whether they would come.”[2]

Pacifist Internal Policing

“Nonviolence was essential to the success of the March, and the organizers thought of every detail. All marchers would be under the leadership of locally appointed captains who would account for their safety and discipline. Two thousand marchers were trained for “internal marshaling.” They would wear white shirts and dark trousers and strive to create an atmosphere of “passive, peaceful, nonviolent behaviour.”[3]

“To minimize the risk of confrontation with hostile groups, the march was planned as a one-day, Wednesday event. With no weekend on either side of the march day, most workers would need to get back home. Ceremonies would last no later than 4:00 p.m., so the buses could be loaded and out of town before darkness fell. The organizers would work hand in hand with government agencies as well.”

Pacifist-Police Collaboration

“[O]nce President Kennedy accepted that the March on Washington would take place despite his

misgivings, he made sure the attorney general, Robert Kennedy, and his assistant, Burke Marshall, were in constant contact with the march organizers so that no security question was left to chance. As early as six weeks prior to the date of the march, representatives of the attorney general met with Randolph and Rustin specifically, and they worked through each relevant decision together. Of great importance was the site of the rally. The Lincoln Memorial was the perfect spot. Blacks had used the monument, dedicated in 1922, as a symbol of freedom,



President John F. Kennedy meets with Black civil rights leaders to discuss March on Washington, 1963.

linking their struggle against discrimination with the memory of the Great Emancipator.[4] It was virtually hallowed ground—not a setting likely to stir anger and violence. To ensure better control, the march would take place within a narrow range of less than a mile—between the Washington Monument and the memorial. As time for the event neared and problems of logistics arose, Attorney General Kennedy and his deputy

Marshall continued to offer the full range of government resources. One of the president’s advance organizers, and an expert on crowd control, even thought of what to do if speakers at the rally stirred the audience to dangerous levels. Should that happen, from his position behind Lincoln’s statue he could flip a special switch that would cut the power on the public address system.”[5]

'Non-Violent ' Police State

“Furthermore, if internal crowd controls put in place by Rustin did not work, the government was prepared. On the day of the March, all leave was cancelled for Washington’s 2,900 police and for 1,000 police in the nearby suburbs.[6] The city banned liquor sales, and Washington hospitals cancelled elective surgery for the day in case any injuries put extra demands on the facility. Several thousand U.S. troops were standing by in Maryland and Virginia to be called into service if needed. Some thought all of this preparation “overkill.” The black comedian Dick Gregory told Burke Marshall, “I know these senators and congressmen are scared of what’s going to happen. I’ll tell you what’s going to happen. It’s going to be a great big Sunday picnic.”[7]

Pacifist Censorship

“The potential for political fallout became crystal clear when the White House got a copy of the speech that

John Lewis, the young president of the increasingly militant SNCC, planned to give at the Lincoln Memorial rally. The sentence that bothered Kennedy was "In good conscience, we cannot support the administration's civil rights bill, for it is too little too late." [8] Primarily Lewis opposed the fact that the bill did not protect blacks from violence or guarantee the right to vote, but the statement seemed a clear denial of the link between the march and the Kennedy's efforts to secure passage of this act. Others were offended by Lewis's speech as well. The Roman Catholic Archbishop Patrick O'Boyle was troubled by the phrase, "Patience is a dirty and nasty word," and the militancy of the lines: "We will march through the South, through the heart of Dixie, the way Sherman did. We shall pursue our own 'scorched earth' policy and burn Jim Crow to the ground non-violently." [9] A man who had worked tirelessly as a civil rights activist for many years, O'Boyle said that if the "Sherman" part wasn't changed he wouldn't deliver the invocation the next day.

"(...)

"By late morning on the day of the march, Lewis and several other SNCC leaders were huddled together with march leaders in a security guard's office behind Lincoln's statue still debating various edited revisions of the speech. At one point a last-minute version of the speech edited by the president himself was delivered by deputy attorney general, Burke Marshall, who had rushed over in the sidecar of a police motorcycle." [10]

This set off a heated debate that ended only with the elder, Randolph, pleading with Lewis and other SNCC members to tone down their speech:

"Finally, perhaps to preserve the spirit of unity and out of respect for the long struggle of a venerable leader, a salvaged agreement was made. Despite the changes in wording, Lewis's speech was the most militant of the day. Telling an audience who interrupted his speech with applause fourteen times that "the revolution is at hand," his strident, impassioned language was a harbinger of a separate movement to come." [11]

Notes

[1] Branch, Taylor. *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988, p. 840.

[2] Paula Pfeffer. A. *Philip Randolph, Pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement*, p. 244.

[3] Ibid, p. 249.

[4] Fairclough, Adam. *Martin Luther King Jr*. Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1995, p. 89.

[5] Reeves, Richard. *President Kennedy, Profile of Power*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993, p. 581.

[6] Hampton, Henry and Steve Fayer with Sarah Flynn. *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s Through the 1980s*. New York: Bantam Books, 1990, p. 161.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Marable, Manning, and Leith Mullings, editors. *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: Voices of Resistance, Reform, and Renewal*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000, p. 407.

[9] Reeves, p. 581.

[10] Branch, p. 878.

[11] Branch, p. 880.

* Randolph was a longtime organizer in the Black civil rights movement. He was the president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, a small but influential union. Randolph had extensive contacts with organized labour and business, and was critical in gaining support from organized labour for civil rights groups. He was also a "staunch anti-communist."

Birmingham Bombing, 1963

On September 15, 1963, just weeks after the March on Washington, a church in Birmingham, Alabama, was bombed. The target was the 16th St. Baptist Church, an organizing base for the civil rights movement in the city. The attack occurred six days after local schools were desegregated. The bomb killed four young girls (one was 11 years old, three were 14 years old).

As fireman and police arrived, a mob of Black youths gathered and began throwing rocks and bottles. In

the clashes that followed, two more Black youth were killed, one by police and another by white youth.

In the streets, armed white racists patrolled their neighbourhoods. King arrived that evening, secured in a 'safe house' with armed bodyguards, demanding the deployment of federal troops from the Kennedy administration.

Even at this time of outrage and sorrow, Kennedy still manoeuvred to dampen Black militancy, using the impending civil rights act as leverage:

"He then asked King to help forestall further violent outbreaks and demonstrations. Kennedy said they could adversely affect the civil rights bill... 'Congress can't



Four victims of Birmingham Bombing.

do very much, unless we keep the support of the white community throughout the country.”

(*The Bystander*, p. 443)

Following the bombings, King and the SCLC returned to Birmingham to launch another campaign focused on hiring Black cops. The rationale for this was the failure by police, or perhaps their unwillingness, to arrest the bombers, or to solve any of the scores of bombings that had occurred since 1956.

Unable to actually launch a mass campaign, however, King attempted to bluff the city into enacting the reform. He set a 2-week ultimatum, which was extended by five days, and then finally dropped. King stated he believed the city would hire Black officers in the near future (not until 1967 did Birmingham hire its first Black cop). The failure of the Birmingham campaign left people feeling defeated and demoralized. And many remained armed, a sure sign of their lack of faith in King's Gandhian pacifism.

1964: Civil Rights, Riots, and the War on Poverty

Following the 1963 assassination of John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson became President of the US. He continued the administration's efforts to contain and co-opt Black rebellion. In January 1964, he introduced the *Economic Opportunity Act* as part of a broader “War on Poverty.” An office of Economic Opportunity was established to administer millions of dollars in government funds, leading to the creation of employment, housing, and anti-poverty programs. Many of the main civil rights groups would be the primary recipients of this money.

On July 2, 1964, the *Civil Rights Act* was passed, which had become the main objective of the reformist civil rights groups. By this time however, not even the state's reforms, or its official sanction of King's nonviolent movement, could turn back the rising tide of Black rebellion.

From July 18-26, 1964, rioting broke out in the Harlem & Brooklyn districts of New York City after a Black youth was shot and killed by police. In the days following the rioting, from July 27-28, King was in New York at the invitation of the city mayor for discussions on how to prevent future rebellions.

In August, 1964, the bodies of three civil rights workers were found in Mississippi. While many other killings had occurred in the South over the years, this case

received substantial publicity because they were from the Northern US (two whites, one black).

In December, 1964, King received the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, Norway. By this time, the SCLC had a budget of several hundred thousand dollars, much of it from the federal government and corporate foundations (see below).

Selma, Alabama 1965

In January 1965, the SCLC, along with SNCC, began a campaign for voter registration in Selma, Alabama. Selma was chosen due to the high percentage of Blacks and the low level of registered voters among them. January 18 was declared “Freedom Day,” and 400 voter applicants marched with King to the Selma court house. None were registered, although there were no arrests.

The next day, 62 people were arrested. After this, near daily protests resulted in 2,600 being arrested by February 3. Protests and mass arrests spread to neighbouring counties and towns. On February 15, nearly 3,000 people participated in marches in three different towns.

Then, on the evening of February 18, after the arrest of a SCLC worker and a march to the Selma court house in solidarity, police launched a violent assault. Dimming the street lights and targeting media cameras, the police attacked the protesters and shot one person, who died several days later.

On March 5, King met with President Johnson to discuss the growing crisis. Two days later, on March 7, a planned march from Selma to Montgomery was held. As it proceeded to cross the Pettus Bridge, however, state troopers attacked with tear gas and baton

charges. As the crowd withdrew, people from a nearby housing project began throwing bricks at the police and picking up weapons. Altogether, 78 people were injured. The day was dubbed “Bloody Sunday.”

That night, people met and were determined to carry out another march in two days. On the day of the protest, however, King made a deal, negotiated by a government official, to make a symbolic gesture and only march to the bridge, then turn back at the point where the march two days prior had been attacked. In exchange, the police did not attack.

Meanwhile, solidarity protests after Bloody Sunday spread to other cities and regions; 15,000 marched in Harlem, with some 10,000 in Detroit. On March 11, President Johnson announced measures to pass a voting rights bill, and on March 17 it was rushed to the Senate for



Rioting in Harlem, New York City, 1964.

debate (the Voting Rights Bill would be passed on August 6).

On March 21, some 3,000 people set out for the march to Montgomery from Selma, protected by FBI, marshals, and Alabama National Guard soldiers. The march concluded on March 25 with a large rally of some 25,000.

The march from Selma to Montgomery was seen as a victory celebration of sorts, due to the federal government's haste in introducing the Voting Rights Bill. This was the last major civil rights campaign of the SCLC, and the movement in general. After a failed attempt to mount a campaign in Warrenpoint, Virginia, King and the SCLC then focused their main organizing effort on the North.

Despite thousands of nonviolent protesters being arrested, extensive boycotts and other public demonstrations, desegregation was ultimately imposed not by people power, but through the deployment of US Army and National Guard troops. Without such forces, or the threat to deploy them, many more Blacks (and their white allies) would undoubtedly have been killed through white racist terror.

The government intervened militarily in order to minimize growing social unrest, to ensure that federal laws were enforced, and to blunt the growing militancy of the Black movement. Although the civil rights campaign relied almost exclusively on state laws and military force, pacifists still claim the struggle to have been an entirely nonviolent victory:

“[P]roponents of nonviolence frequently rely on the violence of the state, not just to protect them, but also to accomplish their goals... Pacifists claiming to eschew violence helped to desegregate schools and universities throughout the South, but, ultimately, it was armed units of the National Guard that allowed the first black students to enter these schools and protect them from forceful attempts at expulsion and worse. If pacifists are unable to defend their own gains, what will they do when they don't have the organized violence of the police and National Guard? (Incidentally, would pacifists remember desegregation as a failure for nonviolence if black families had needed to call in the Deacons for Defense, instead of the National Guard, to protect their children entering those all-white schools?).”

(*How Nonviolence Protects the State*, pp. 52-53)

1965: 'Freedom Summer' and Watts Riot

On February 21, 1965, Malcolm X was assassinated in New York. 22,000 people attended his funeral. Malcolm had only recently left the Nation of Islam and had established the Organization of Afro-American Unity. He had dramatically altered his views on Europeans, still promoted Black nationalism and self-defence, as well as African culture, and still advocated revolution. His legacy would have a large influence over the next generation of Black militants.

From June to August, SNCC and CORE conducted voter registration in Mississippi as part of the 'Freedom Summer' campaign. That same summer, major riots occurred in New York, Rochester, Philadelphia, New Jersey and Chicago. From August 11-16, the Watts district in Los Angeles exploded in large-scale rioting, with 34 people killed and over \$30 million in damages.

“In these [riots], 36 persons were killed and 1,026 were injured. Arrests numbered over 10,000 and total property damage was estimated at over \$40 million... One of the 1965 riots, however, was the first of the truly massive and catastrophic outbreaks. It occurred in the Watts section of Los Angeles, and it accounted for most of the deaths, injuries, arrests and property damage... It is very likely that at least 20 percent of the area's residents participated in some way in the riot.”

(*Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream*, pp. 51-51)



Freedom Riders under armed guard, 1961.



Columns of smoke rise from Watts, California, during revolt in August, 1965.

Chicago Freedom Movement, 1966

Due to the summer riots of the previous three years, the federal government and corporations began directing millions of dollars in funding towards programs for employment and housing (all under the 'War on Poverty'). Some of the main recipients were the reformist civil rights groups. This was the ruling class response to the disorders and disturbances that threatened their rule. It is no coincidence that King and the SCLC were now deployed into the Northern ghettos on a mission of pacification.

In many cities, part of the 'War on the Poor' consisted of demolishing massive apartment blocks and dispersing Black tenants to other parts of the city. Called 'urban renewal,' many Blacks referred to it as 'Negro removal.' In 1965, the SCLC selected Chicago as the most likely place to launch a successful campaign of nonviolent civil disobedience and expand their philosophy out of the South. In Chicago, this would be focused primarily around housing. Although legally desegregated, Chicago was highly divided on racial lines. Blacks occupied ghettoized regions of the inner city, with high unemployment and widespread discrimination. Housing and the real estate market itself was still highly segregated.

SCLC workers acquired apartments in the ghetto, as did King in a publicity event attended by reporters. The Chicago Freedom Movement, as it became known, was established as a coalition of civil rights, anti-poverty, housing, and other groups (it was also referred to as the Chicago Open Housing Movement).

In the ghettos, a 'Union to End Slums' was started, however the SCLC,

“discovered that the black preacher lacked the singular prestige he enjoyed in the South, and that the church was an inadequate organizing tool. Some became dispirited by the apathy, hostility, and cynicism they encountered...

“The recruitment of black youths, who had provided much of SCLC's demonstration manpower in the South, posed an especially difficult challenge. The ghettos were plagued by teenage gangs [who] displayed hostility towards all established authority. The gangs were disdainful of the church, antagonistic towards whites, and contemptuous of the word 'nonviolence.'... In Chicago the gangs were larger, stronger, and more violent” (*To Redeem the Soul of America*, p. 288).

Although unable to mobilize a mass movement in the ghetto, the coalition carried out boycotts and pickets of stores (to force them to hire Blacks). Protests and rallies were also conducted, and on July 10 one of the largest was held with as many as sixty thousand rallying at Soldier Field Stadium (including celebrities such as Mahalia Jackson, Stevie Wonder, and Peter Paul and Mary).

Two days later, on July 12, rioting began in the city's West Side after an altercation between residents and police. By July 14, the rioting had spread to 600 city blocks. Amid gunshots, looting, and clashes with police, two people died. On July 15, National Guard troops were deployed. The Mayor publicly blamed King and the protests for causing the disorder.

Then, from July 18-23, rioting broke out in another part of the city. Despite the riots, the Freedom Movement continued with plans for their campaign for 'open housing.'

On July 27, a 'prayer vigil' was held at a real estate office in a white neighbourhood. That night, a mob of 200 whites attacked the vigil and drove the protesters away. Over the next two days, protest marches were held through white neighbourhoods, where the mobs became larger and threw rocks and bottles. King demanded more protection, and the levels of police would dramatically increase.

From August 2-5, more protests were held, and the mobs got larger. On August 5, as many as 5,000 angry whites rallied in the Gage Park area. Some 1,000 cops protected the 800 protesters, a mix of Blacks and whites. King himself was hit in the head with a rock and knocked to the ground. On August 8, some 1,500 protesters marched, while police and rain limited the size and activities of the white mob.

Despite the growing potential for disturbance, the city powers refused to negotiate. When King and the Freedom Movement announced their intention to march through the notoriously racist Cicero area on August 27, the mayor met with King and an agreement was reached.

While the protests were called off, the 'Summit Agreement,' as it was dubbed, was criticized for lacking any time-line for implementation or challenge to the discriminatory housing or real estate policies. In October, when



King in Chicago, 1966.



King struck in head by rock, Chicago's Cicero district, 1966.

King returned to the city, he threatened that the Cicero march hadn't been cancelled, but only 'postponed.'

King and the SCLC departed Chicago in defeat. They returned to the South, where King would eventually launch a 'Poor Peoples' movement oriented largely around the 'War on Poverty.' Later, he would begin speaking out against the US war in Vietnam in an effort to revive the civil rights movement by linking it to the emerging anti-war movement. He would be assassinated in 1968 by a white racist gunman in Texas.

1966: Black Power

While King and the SCLC attempted to establish themselves in Chicago, Black militancy had begun to crystallize with the rallying cry of "Black Power." In 1966, during a march in Mississippi, Stokely Carmichael, now chairman of the SNCC, popularized the term Black Power and urged armed self-defence for Black communities.

Black militants challenged the doctrines of nonviolence and integration, as well as the middle-class Blacks, such as King, that championed them. In a 1967 article entitled "The Dialectics of Revolution," Carmichael stated:

"As you know, the Black Power movement that SNCC initiated moved away from the integration movement. Because of the integration movement's middle-class orientation, because of its subconscious racism, and because of its nonviolent approach, it has never been able to involve the black proletariat [working class]. It could never attract and hold the young bloods..."

(Stokely Speaks, p. 88)

Another contributing factor to the rise of Black militancy were the ongoing anti-colonial rebellions in the 'Third World' at the time, including Algeria, Cuba, the Congo, Vietnam, etc. Along with Malcolm X, Frantz Fanon, who participated in the Algerian revolution, was celebrated as a leading intellectual who advocated anti-colonial revolutionary violence. His book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, had a large influence on Black radicals in the US, and internationally.

The slogan Black Power as a form of self-determination meant Black control over their organizations and communities, including political institutions, policing, business, education, and culture. It helped spawn a renewed pride in African culture, greater self-confidence, and morale. It was also co-opted by middle-class Blacks to mean 'Black capitalism,' and this version was promoted by the US ruling class. In 1968, President Nixon referred to Black Power in a televised speech in which he was

promoting private investment in ghettos and black capitalism. Despite this, Black Power was predominantly a frightening bogeyman to white America.

What was in part so disturbing about Black Power were the ongoing violent eruptions of rioting, which seemed to further embolden advocates of Black Power. In 1966 and '67, major riots occurred in Atlanta, San Francisco, Oakland, Baltimore, Seattle, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Columbus, Chicago, New York, and Detroit:

"The summer of 1967 surpassed all the others in the frequency and severity of rioting. When it was over, the



Stokely Carmichael, 1966, then chairman of SNCC.

Senate Permanent Committee on Investigation determined that there had been 75 'major' riots, in which 83 persons lost their lives, 1,897 were injured, and 16,389 were arrested. Property damage was estimated at a record \$664.5 million, almost seventeen times greater than in the 1965 wave of violence... The worst of the 1967 riots occurred in Newark and Detroit. The rioting in Newark lasted for three days: twenty-five persons were killed, all but two of them black; about 1,200

were injured, and over 1,300 arrests were made. Property damage was estimated... at \$10.25 million... with over a thousand businesses damaged or destroyed. Soon after the violence in Newark and a number of lesser disorders, the worst riot to date broke out in Detroit, smashing records in every category: 43 deaths, over 2,000 known injuries, over 3,800 arrests, and property damage estimated at \$85 million. In both numbers and range, the law enforcement personnel called in also reached new peaks: 4,300 local police officers, 370 state troopers, 1,100 National Guardsmen, and 4,700 Army paratroopers were involved; another 8,000 National Guardsmen were placed on alert.

"The last of the long, hot summers proved to be 1968 and then the violence was concentrated in the late spring and early summer. In April, while in Memphis to lend support to striking sanitation

workers, Martin Luther King was shot and killed by a white assassin. Black people, some of whom had never felt a close identification with King, set out to avenge his death. During the first eight months of the year, 313 riots and disorders occurred, a large percentage of which took place in the immediate aftermath of the assassination, and 78 lives were lost."

(Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream, p. 67)

In the aftermath of King's assassination on April 4, 1968, Black people throughout the US responded not only with prayer and vigils, but with angry rebellion. Along with the previous 4 years of rioting, this showed that, despite widespread sympathy for the King, large sectors of

the Black population did not embrace his pacifist beliefs. Chicago, where King had attempted to organize just two years before, saw some of the worst rioting.

In fact, even while reformist groups were receiving millions of dollars a year in government and corporate funding, their actual support among Black people was at its lowest point. At the time of his assassination, King and the SCLC were switching their focus to the 'Poor People's Campaign,' advocating jobs and education. King was also beginning to turn against the Vietnam War, which he had seldom addressed publicly. After King's death, the SCLC carried through with a planned tent city in Washington, DC. The SCLC had trouble mobilizing even the bare minimum of protesters they believed necessary to occupy the tent city (some 3,000), which fizzled out after deteriorating into a muddy, wet, fiasco.

Black Panthers

In contrast to the bloated bureaucracies of the official civil rights movement, the most active and dynamic groups in the late 1960s were the Black militants, primarily the Black Panther Party which had been established in Oakland, California, on Oct. 15, 1966. Their original title had been the Black Panther Party for Self- Defense, and in many ways they were the legacy of Malcolm X.

“The leading exponent of a nonracialist, Marxist-Leninist brand of black liberation continued to be the Black Panther Party. During the late 1960s the Panthers' reputation grew, especially after they disrupted a session of the California legislature in 1967... By 1969 the Panther's newspaper, *The Black Panther*, had achieved a circulation of over 100,000 nationwide... Panther chapters across the country initiated various community programs of a less than inflammatory nature: free breakfasts were served to more than 20,000 children in 19 cities; Liberation schools were opened for youngsters during the summer vacation, and a free health program was initiated.”

(*Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream*, p. 68)

In 1966, King and the SCLC attempted to establish themselves in Northern ghetto areas, including Chicago and New York:

“But the SCLC staff members found it hard going: such was the hostility among young blacks to 'nonviolence' that the staff found it prudent not to mention the word. In a

sermon at Rochester's Central Presbyterian Church, Young [SCLC's executive director] confessed that he represented 'a group [that] was as unpopular as anybody else... Nonviolence had been so misinterpreted in the Negro community of the North that to come as a member of a nonviolent movement... is to put two strikes on you to start with...’”

(*To Redeem the Soul of America*, pp. 196-97)

The Panthers were the exact opposite of King and the SCLC. While the SCLC were Southern middle-class church-goers and ministers, sworn to nonviolence, the Panthers were primarily Northern youth from urban ghettos, the very terrain that King and the SCLC had attempted to colonize in Chicago in 1966:

“The membership of the Black Panther Party was recruited from the ghettos of the inner cities. The Party itself was founded by two Black men who came straight out of the ghetto.”

(Panther member Safiya A. Bokhari, quoted in *We Want Freedom*, p. 172)

“The Black Panther Party of Chicago emerged on the city's West Side in the autumn of 1968. As one of 45 Black Panther chapters around the country, the “Illinois Chapter” gained over 300 new members within four months of its founding...”

(Encyclopedia of Chicago,

<http://encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/142.html>)

While ghetto youth had little time for King and his Christian pacifism, they joined the Panthers in the hundreds. High school kids, college students, prisoners, and gangsters, all became members of the Black Panther Party. Many committed their lives to revolutionary struggle, organizing meetings and protests, selling newspapers, training, and studying.

In the climate of urban riots and insurrection that marked the period, the Panthers symbolized and promoted a warrior spirit among Black youth. The first chapter appeared in Oakland, California, conducting Police-Alert Patrols. Armed with rifles, law books, tape recorders, and cameras, the Panthers monitored police in the Black ghetto. They helped get those arrested out of jail, and advised people of their rights.

The Panthers were established in Oakland by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale. Newton was a college student who had studied law. It was his understanding of the legal code that led to the police patrols—although provocative, they were not intended as armed confrontations or assaults on police.

The armed patrols were, at the time, legal under California law: weapons could be legally carried in public



Bobby Seale & Huey P. Newton, founders of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, 1966.

as long as they were not concealed and there was not a round in the chamber. Citizens also had the right to observe police if they kept a certain distance away from arresting officers.

In 1967, as officials introduced a new law to stop the public carrying of firearms, a group of armed Panthers entered the state capital building in Sacramento in protest. The action received national publicity and raised the profile of the group to Black youth across the country.

By 1969, the Panthers had established 40 chapters across the country, organized as political party and paramilitary group, with an emphasis on anti-colonial and anti-capitalist struggle, armed self-defence, and community mobilizing. The basic chapter organization consisted of:

- *Party Supporter*: buys the newspaper, attends rallies, etc.
- *Community Worker*: Volunteers time for events, programs, and other activities.
- *Panther-in-Training*: Probationary members who must memorize the Panther's 10 Point Program (the basic goals of the Party), rules of discipline, and attend Political Education classes.
- *Black Panther*: trained members who were expected to build and protect the organization, further its aims and objectives, as determined by local, regional, and national headquarters. These members were virtual full-time workers, who often lived collectively and dedicated every full day to organizing.

Training within the Panthers included the Political Education classes, martial arts and weapons handling. Collectivity was stressed and individualism seen as a negative trait. According to Mumia Abu-Jamal, a member of the Philadelphia Panther chapter, this helped foster humility, self-sacrifice, and discipline. The average age of members was 17-22.

Some of the main community programs run by the Panthers included a Breakfast for School Children, Liberation Schools, health clinics, legal aid, prisoner solidarity (including arranging transport for family and friends to visit prisons), as well as free clothing and shoe services.

Although portrayed as a racist, anti-white 'hate' group, the Panthers were actually anti-racist and one of the only Black nationalist groups that entered into alliances

with non-Blacks, including Chicanos, whites, and Asians. In Chicago, they helped organize the Young Patriots Party, comprised of poor white youth from the Appalachians. National leaders also ran as candidates in the predominantly white Peace and Freedom Party.



Black Panthers breakfast program.

The Panthers identified capitalism and US imperialism as the main enemy and frequently promoted multinational unity, while maintaining Black self-determination and self-organization. They promoted revolutionary internationalism, and saw Blacks in the US as an 'internal colony' that was naturally linked to the anti-imperialist struggles of the Third World. The Panthers identified themselves as Marxist-Leninists and especially promoted the writings of Mao, one of the organizers of the 1949 Chinese Revolution.

Designated as a Black 'hate' group by the FBI, the Panthers were labelled the number one internal security threat to the US. Not because of their violence—the majority of attacks were initiated by police—but because of what they represented: armed Black insurgency. Singh offers this interpretation:

“The Panthers trademark actions of picking up the gun and patrolling the police were not initially conceived as preludes to an armed revolt. Rather, they were actually strategic choices and carefully posed challenges to the so-called legitimate forms of state violence that had become all too regularly used within Black communities... Asserting their own right to organized violence, the Panthers began to police the police... Invoking the US Constitution, employing a logic of policing and the law against the police and the law, the Panthers thus posed a stunning challenge to the legitimacy of state power in Black communities.

“The violent demise of the Panthers, I would suggest, is still best understood when viewed within the context of these initial acts of subversion, namely, the threats they posed to the legitimate power of the state.”

(Nikhil Pal Singh, “The Black Panthers and the Undeveloped Country' of the Left,” *The Black Panther Party (Reconsidered)*, p. 81)

Under the FBI's Counter-Intelligence Program (Cointel-Pro), the Panthers were targeted with surveillance, infiltration, and disruptive techniques designed to divide, demoralize, and discredit the organization. Police also



instigated numerous lethal assaults and violent confrontations with Panthers. Between 1968 to 1970, some 28 armed confrontations occurred, resulting in 19 Panthers being killed. Many of these attacks were carried out against Party offices, which became fortified bunkers (and which were later abandoned; the Philadelphia office was defended by hundreds of community residents when it was threatened with police assault). Some, such as a chapter office in Los Angeles, had trenches dug around its outside, and an escape tunnel.

On December 4, 1969, Fred Hampton, the head of the Chicago chapter and a promising leader, along with another Panther, Mark Clark, were gunned down in their sleep during a police raid. The killings,

“sent a disturbing message to Panthers all across the country: we will kill you in your sleep with impunity.”

(We Want Freedom, p. 189)



Fred Hampton, a Chicago Black Panther killed by police December 4, 1969.

Four days later, during a raid by Los Angeles police, the first time a SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics) unit was deployed, the Panthers engaged police in a six-hour long gun battle. Geronimo Pratt, an ex-Vietnam war veteran and Panther, was credited with organizing the defence of the office (and would later be targeted by the FBI, framed, and imprisoned for several decades).

During this time, the Panthers were thoroughly demonized by the media, police, government officials, and reformist Black organizations. Despite this massive campaign to discredit the Panthers, and their use of armed resistance, a 1970 public opinion poll found that 25 percent of Blacks had “great respect” for the Panthers, including 43 percent of Blacks under 21 years of age.

Another poll that same year showed a similar high level of support:

“Asked whether the Panthers gave Black persons an individual sense of pride by standing up for the rights of Blacks, 66 percent agreed. When asked, ‘Even if you disagree with the views of the Panthers, has the violence against them led you to believe that Black people must stand together to protect themselves?’ a whopping 86 percent of black respondents were in agreement.”

(We Want Freedom, pp. 152-53)

“According to a 1970 Harris poll, 66 percent of African Americans said the activities of the Black Panther Party gave them pride, and 43 percent said the party represented their own views.”

(How Nonviolence Protects the State, p. 11)

By 1970, largely as a result of the deadly counter-insurgency campaign waged against them, the Panthers were divided, demoralized, and dysfunctional. Many members left, continuing to work in their communities with the skills learned while in the Party. Others fled and became exiles in Cuba or Algeria (where an International Section of the Panthers was established). Still others went underground, in part for their own safety but also to begin urban guerrilla units of the Black Liberation Army (BLA).

While there are many valid critiques of the Black Panther Party, there is no doubt that the Panthers had a strong appeal to poor Black youth —far more than King and the SCLC had. And not as reformists seeking equal rights as citizens, but as an explicitly revolutionary party.

Analysis of King and the Civil Rights Movement

Pacifism and the Church

“The SCLC is not an organization, it's a church.”

(Charles Morgan, a white lawyer on the SCLC board, *To Redeem the Soul of America*, p. 1)

The organizational centre of the Black civil rights movement in the US South were the churches, and most of the main leaders were preachers. In this context, their religious and middle-class backgrounds formed the methods, strategies and objectives of the movement, over which they exerted tremendous influence as community “leaders” and through their control of resources.

Role of the Church

Many Blacks in the South, whether working class or middle-class, relied to a large extent on whites for housing, transportation, and employment. There were little public spaces or resources that could be mobilized that were not controlled by whites.

“On the other hand, churches were owned and controlled by blacks themselves... With a high degree of economic independence, preachers enjoyed a freedom of speech and action denied to the majority of blacks...”

“As an organizational tool it was second to none. In a city with neither a black radio station nor a widely read

black newspaper, the church provided the information network. It also provided the meeting places, the fund-raising machinery, and the means of organizing an alternative transportation system [during bus boycotts].”

(To Redeem the Soul of America, pp. 14-17)

The church culture and organization permeated the SCLC and its affiliates. Shortly after its establishment in 1957, the SCLC adopted the slogan “To Redeem the Soul of America,” revealing its evangelical mentality. It had also added the “Christian” part to its title. These were adopted to counter charges of communist influence, and because almost the entire SCLC leadership were ministers.

SCLC meetings, rallies, and protests were organized in churches and conducted as church gatherings. Hymns by choirs and speeches by ministers dominated. Protests to courthouses or city halls were termed “prayer pilgrimages,” and pickets outside businesses were often referred to as “prayer vigils.” The churches provided not only an organizing base, but also a well-disciplined body of people, accustomed to the church hierarchy and moral codes.

Beyond this core of church-going members, however, the SCLC was not able to recruit substantial numbers of non-church goers. In fact, the church purposely avoided many of those who did not attend church because of their “corrupting” morals. Consequently, they were unable to organize a substantial number of working class Blacks into the movement. This was even more pronounced when the SCLC attempted to expand into the North (i.e., Chicago 1966), where the church had far less influence:

“The SCLC also made little attempt, apparently, to assimilate and interpret its experience in Rochester [New York, where it sent workers after the riots in 1964]. It had always recruited in the churches; it went against SCLC's grain to organize among the people who shunned the churches and frequented bars, pool halls, and street corners.”

(To Redeem the Soul of America, p. 197)

King's Role in SCLC

Like Gandhi, King has been described as an “autocrat” in his organizing and leadership methods, revealing once again the intense authoritarian nature of middle-class pacifism:

“SCLC was not only dominated by King, its very structure appeared to be built around him. On paper, the board of directors acted as SCLC's governing body. In practise, as far as policy was concerned, it functioned as a rubber stamp. Consisting for the most part of King's own nominees, it rarely questioned, and even more rarely

opposed, the policies and statements that King placed before it. Equally striking was the extent to which SCLC framed its public image and appeal around the King persona... the black leader of heroic proportions... SCLC became an autocratic organization which revolved around King, and this absence of internal democracy... eventually contributed to its decay.”

(To Redeem the Soul of America, p. 38)

King's persona began to irritate Ella Baker, the SCLC worker who had done extensive organizing in the civil rights movements since the 1930s, and who assisted the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) when it began in 1960:

“Baker also found it difficult to get along with King. 'He wasn't the kind of person you could engage in dialogue with,' she later stated, 'if the dialogue questioned the almost exclusive rightness of his position.' She came to regard King as a rather pompous preacher, with little political awareness but with an inflated sense of self-importance and a condescending attitude to women.”

(To Redeem the Soul of America, p. 49)



Ella Baker, a long-time civil rights worker.

During the emergence of the student sit-in movement and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, in 1960, Ella Baker urged students to establish “group-centered leadership” and not a “leadership-centered group.”

“From her vantage point in Montgomery, Virginia Durr catalogued the grumblings and complaints of local activists who felt that the MIA [Montgomery Improvement Association] had become a one-man band, with everything revolving round King. 'He cannot stand criticism,' she observed, 'and has to be a LEADER of sheep, not a real democratic worker along with the others.' Lawrence Reddick, the historian from Alabama State College who sat on SCLC's board, referred to these criticisms in his 1959 biography of King, *Crusader without Violence*. There was a growing feeling, he wrote, that King was 'taking too many bows and enjoying them... forgetting that Montgomery had been the result of collective thought and collective action.' This, plus his obvious liking for fine clothes, expensive restaurants, and first class hotels, placed a question mark over his sincerity; even some of his MIA colleagues 'felt that he was bent on making a fortune.' King was also 'too much in motion,' Reddick thought, 'flying about the country, speaking almost everywhere.'

(To Redeem the Soul of America, p.50)

Fellowship on Reconciliation

One of the groups that facilitated the spread of the Gandhi doctrine among the Civil Rights Movement was the Fellowship on Reconciliation (FOR). The FOR advocated Gandhi's pacifist religion and had for many years worked to have it implemented by mainstream reformist groups. The FOR helped establish the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) in 1942, in part to engage in Gandhi-like 'nonviolent direct action' (a term CORE pioneered).



MLK with Glenn Smiley.

During the Montgomery bus boycott (1956-57), the FOR sent workers to promote their Gandhian doctrine. They provided King and the Montgomery Improvement Association with training and information on pacifist methods. FOR also initiated a conference to coordinate civil disobedience for civil rights that led to the formation of the SCLC, in 1957.

One of the FOR members sent to Montgomery, however, found King's nonviolence less than ideal. In a report to headquarters, Glenn Smiley stated:

"King can be a Negro Gandhi... He had Gandhi in mind when this thing started, he says... wants to do it right, but is too young and some of his close help is violent. King accepts, as an example, a body guard, and asked for a permit for them to carry guns. This was denied by the police, but nevertheless, the place is an arsenal... he believes and yet he doesn't believe. The whole movement is armed in a sense, and this is what I must convince him to see as the greatest evil. If he can really be won to a faith in non-violence, there is no end to what he can do. Soon he will be able to direct the movement by the sheer force of being the symbol of resistance."

(*To Redeem the Soul of America*, p. 24-25)

Smiley would not only instruct King on the finer points of pacifism, but would also be an invited speaker at the church meetings. King himself began to more frequently refer to the need for "love" and "nonviolence."

Bayard Rustin was a long-time organizer in Black reformist groups. Raised by Quakers, Rustin was a member of the FOR based in New York. During World War 2 Rustin was jailed as a 'conscientious objector.'

From 1957-68, Rustin played an influential role in the SCLC and was a primary adviser to King. In 1966, as King began to voice criticism of the Vietnam War, Rustin the pacifist pulled a Gandhi and advocated that Blacks join the US military and ignore the anti-war movement:

"Rustin advised blacks to shun the peace movement because their immediate problems were 'so vast and crushing that they have little time or energy to focus upon international crises.' In another article he urged blacks to seize the opportunity provided by the armed forces 'to learn a trade, earn a salary, and be in a position to enter the job market on their return.'"

(*To Redeem the Soul of America*, p. 338)

Class

Along with their religious morality, another factor contributing to the SCLC's inability to mobilize working class blacks was its own class composition. Most of the civil rights movement's organizers were middle-class professionals and business owners:

"[M]any, if not most, [of the prominent civil rights leaders] were self-employed businessmen and professionals, whose clientele was wholly or mainly blacks—doctors, dentists, lawyers, undertakers, store owners. Like ministers, they enjoyed economic security which gave them latitude to defy white opinion...."

(*To Redeem the Soul of America*, p. 14)



Selma, Alabama, 1965: the SCLC sought to promote an image of respectable, middle-class Americanism.

The constitution and bylaws adopted by the SCLC in 1958 provided for a governing board of 33 people.

"What kind of people sat on the SCLC's board? They were all black, and at least two-thirds were ministers. The lay minority included a dentist, a pharmacist, a professor of history, several businessmen, and an official of the International Longshoreman's Association.

Only one woman sat on the board. All but a handful of the ministers were Baptists. Graduates and professors of Morehouse College (Atlanta) and Alabama State College

(Montgomery) accounted for eight of SCLC's nine original officers... as defined in terms of education, occupation, wealth, and social standing, most of SCLC's founders came from the relatively small upper middle class."

(To Redeem the Soul of America, pp. 34-35)

The Civil Rights Movement's methods and goals reflected the middle-class composition of the movement itself. A primary example was the Chicago 1966 campaign which focused, in part, on desegregating the housing real estate market.

"It has often been stated that the goals of the southern movement were the goals of a black middle class—voting rights and the right to eat at the same lunch counter as whites, stay in the same hotel, ride the same bus or go to the same school. But beyond the symbolic value of such goals, they were of little immediate use to most lower-class black residents of inner-city neighbourhoods in the North..."

(Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream, p. 51)

Reformism

Like the NAACP and CORE, the SCLC sought reformist changes to the government and laws (constitutionalism). They were not radicals and did not seek revolutionary change. Nor were they anti-capitalist. Instead, they sought integration into US society, in order to have "equal opportunities" in employment, housing, transportation, business, etc. These reforms actively promoted assimilation of middle-class Blacks into US capitalist society.

Like the Moderates of the Indian National Congress, the entire strategy of the reformist civil rights movement was based on the government enacting reforms. Many of the demands of the reformist groups also reflected their middle-class composition, including voting rights in the South and, during the Chicago campaign of 1966, desegregation of the real estate market.

On numerous occasions, King and other movement leaders demanded the federal government intervene in civil rights struggles, either with US Marshals, military forces, and/or legislation. Many of the 'victories' of the civil rights movement were obtained only through intervention by the federal government and courts. This included, at times, large deployments of US Army, FBI, and Marshals to ensure the physical safety of civil rights protesters, and/or to impose federal legislation over state governments.

These measures helped to portray the federal government as sympathetic to the civil rights struggle, and were the same techniques used to dampen the rebellion that began with the 1963 Birmingham riots, an effort officials described as "regaining the confidence" of Blacks.

Carmichael saw the reformist role of the pacifist

middle-class as an indication of its class self-interest:

"The reason the liberal seeks to stop confrontation... is that his role, regardless of what he says, is really to maintain the status quo, rather than to change it. He enjoys economic stability from the status quo and if he fights for change he is risking his economic stability..."

(Stokely Speaks, 170)

The legacy of Martin Luther King is today championed by the Amerikan state through national holidays, monuments, and streets named after him. There are no such monuments for Malcolm X, other than those established by grassroots efforts. As for the Panthers, if not erased from history they are thoroughly demonized. Despite this, it is the legacies of Malcolm X and the Panthers which continue to have the greatest influence on urban Black youth, evident in various forms of popular culture (i.e., hip hop).

Besides the state, the greatest promoters of the myth of King's nonviolent campaign are primarily middle-class whites, who also erase the history of Malcolm X and Black rebellion in general. Despite this, it is clear that it was the use of a diversity of tactics that gave the movement its real strength and forced substantial concessions from the ruling class. Meanwhile, the most radical elements within this movement were targeted by deadly counter-insurgency operations by the state, while being publicly isolated and marginalized by much of the reformist leadership.



The nonviolent campaign of the Civil Rights movement was endorsed by the state and relied on its armed force for protection & enforcement of rights.



Soldiers impose desegregation in Mississippi, 1962.

Rebellion in the Ranks: Pacifists with Guns

While pacifist mythology portrays the Black civil rights movement as entirely nonviolent, with widespread acceptance of the doctrine, this was not the case. In fact, King and other reformists had difficulty persuading people that pacifism was a viable form of resistance.

In a June 1957 speech to students in Berkeley, California, King noted the difficulty of promoting pacifism:

“From the very beginning there was a philosophy undergirding the Montgomery boycott, the philosophy of nonviolent resistance. There was always the problem of getting this method over because it didn't make sense to most of the people in the beginning. We had to use our mass meetings to explain nonviolence to a community of people who had never heard of the philosophy and in many instances were not sympathetic to it...”

(I Have a Dream, p. 30)

King had to constantly tone down his pacifist dogma in the face of considerable scepticism. In a 1960 article entitled “Pilgrimage to Nonviolence,” he stated:

“I am no doctrinaire pacifist. I have tried to embrace realistic pacifism. Moreover, I see the pacifist position not as sinless but as the lesser evil in the circumstances.”

(I Have A Dream, p. 61)

More dedicated pacifists found King's initial commitment to nonviolence questionable. It is worth quoting again Glenn Smiley's observations on his visit to Montgomery, during the bus boycott:

“King can be a Negro Gandhi... He had Gandhi in mind when this thing started, he says... wants to do it right, but is too young and some of his close help is violent. King accepts, as an example, a body guard, and asked for a permit for them to carry guns. This was denied by the police, but nevertheless, the place is an arsenal... he believes and yet he doesn't believe. The whole movement is armed in a sense, and this is what I must convince him to see as the greatest evil. If he can really be won to a faith in non-violence, there is no end to what he can do. Soon he will be able to direct the movement by the sheer force of being the symbol of resistance.”

(To Redeem the Soul of America, p. 24-25)

Andrew Young, an SCLC member, noted a similar lack of commitment to pacifism among many of the grassroots participants in the movement:

“Birmingham was 'probably the most violent city in America,' Young thought, 'and every black family had an arsenal.' Volunteers for demonstrations had to surrender their weapons—John Cross remembered collecting 'almost half a trashcan of knives' one day—and received two hours' indoctrination into nonviolence. SCLC took great pains to disown the rowdy spectators, and when they threatened to get out of control King stopped the demonstrations.”

(To Redeem the Soul of America, p. 138)

During the Albany campaign in July 1962, after violent clashes erupted during a protest, King sought to restore order and promote his pacifist doctrine:

“The next morning King read national newspaper reports placing the blame for Tuesday night's violence squarely on the shoulders of black protesters. King immediately called for a 'day of penance'--a twenty-four moratorium on further demonstrations. Then he set off on a tour of the town's pool halls and taverns, where he cautioned young blacks not to participate in any further violence. But many were growing impatient with King's message of peace. One reporter who accompanied him on the tour observed that '[h]e preached a theme that Albany's restless Negroes were finding harder and harder to accept: nonviolence in their drive to desegregate the town.’”

(The Bystander, p. 320)



Robert Williams and wife Mabel.

As the nonviolent campaign continued throughout the late 1950s and early '60s, increasing incidents of conflict between Blacks and racist whites, including police, began to occur. Reformist organizers were quick to condemn these and distance themselves, but it would be a growing concern until the Birmingham riots of 1963, where the movement leaders lost the internal struggle over tactics and would never regain dominance, despite extensive support and sanction from the state and ruling class.

One of the strongest examples of the total rejection of nonviolence by civil rights organizers was that of Robert Williams, a former US Marine:

“In the late 1950s... a renegade local official of the NAACP named Robert F. Williams had organized a black rifle club in Monroe, North Carolina, which soon became an armed self-defense force. The confrontations in Monroe were somewhat isolated, however, and not well publicized compared to later episodes of... black violence. The erosion of the dominance of non-violence over the movement became more widespread and public after 1963. In 1964 and 1965 rioting would become much more frequent and serious and self-defense groups would begin to proliferate.”

(Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream,

In 1964, Williams helped establish the Deacons for Defense in Louisiana, a Black self-defence force with the purpose of protecting Black civil rights workers. The Deacons eventually had some 50 chapters across the Southern states. Williams also formed the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), an armed group advocating guerrilla warfare. He was later charged with kidnapping as a result of activities in Monroe, and fled to Cuba and then China. He also wrote *Negroes with Guns* in 1962, which had some influence over the emerging debates on self-defence at the time.

Another Black revolutionary organization Williams was involved in was the Republic of New Afrika (RNA), which sought the takeover of five southern states (Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina). Williams resigned from the RNA when he returned to the US to fight the kidnapping charge.

By 1963, amidst ongoing white racist violence against Blacks and civil rights workers, as well as the rupture of the Birmingham riots, the concept of armed self-defence became more widely promoted. Many 'nonviolent' organizers in the South armed themselves, adopting a measure already widely practised among Blacks in the region:

“The advisability of self-defense—which in the Deep South meant, in effect, carrying guns—had long divided SNCC. Their experiences in Mississippi persuaded many staff members of the futility of attempting to dissuade local blacks from defending themselves against white aggression. SNCC had accepted the fact that many ordinary blacks possessed weapons and were prepared—quite rightly, in the view of some SNCC field workers—to use them in self-defense.

“During a debate on nonviolence in June 1964, the executive committee agreed to stand by any SNCC worker 'caught in the home of another person who is armed.' But it stopped short of approving the carrying of arms by SNCC workers themselves. By 1965, however, many staff members did possess guns.”

(*To Redeem the Soul of America*, p. 313)

“While the primarily northern urban riots were challenging the non-violent dominance of the black movement, the issue of self-defense was doing the same in the South. Violent attacks on civil rights workers may have bolstered the legitimacy of the cause, but this was little comfort to those whose lives were on the line. Although they did not make a public issue of it, almost every SNCC worker in the field was carrying a firearm by the time of the

Mississippi Summer Project [1964].”

(*Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream*, pp. 53-54)

Similarly, CORE workers had also begun to arm themselves:

“In 1965 a CORE worker in Ferriday, Louisiana, stated that self-defense in protection of one's home and person was 'taken for granted' and that most of the organization's headquarters in dangerous areas of Louisiana and Mississippi had weapons on the premises to protect against night attacks... Although the members were not of one mind on the subject, CORE was not strictly committed to nonviolence after 1965... and came very close to rescinding its official policy on nonviolence at the national convention that year.”

(*Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream*, p. 54)

Indeed, against the growing movement, white racists carried out a campaign of terror under the banner of the Ku Klux Klan or White Citizens Councils, including assaults, mob violence, bombings, and murders:

“1965 saw an alarming rise in the number of civil rights-related murders: twenty people were killed that year, compared to fourteen in 1964 and thirteen in 1963. Eleven of the 1965 murders took

place in Alabama and Mississippi, and no convictions had been obtained in any of these cases.”

(*To Redeem the Soul of America*, p. 266)

Faced with this widespread rejection of pacifism and the reality of racist violence in the South, King himself had to concede that violent means were at times necessary. In a 1966 article he wrote entitled “Nonviolence: The Only Road to Freedom,” which he used to counter the popularity of the slogan Black Power and militant resistance, he conceded that:

“There are many people who very honestly raise the question of self-defense. This must be placed in perspective. It goes without saying that people will protect their homes. This is a right guaranteed by the Constitution and respected even in the worst areas of the South.”

(*I Have A Dream*, pp. 128-129)

In an earlier article against Robert Williams' use of violence, King wrote “The Social Organization of Nonviolence,” in 1959. King identified three types of resistance: nonviolent, violent aggression, and violent self-defence. Even at this time, he had to concede the necessity for defensive violence:



Malcolm X with M1 carbine; an advocate of armed defence.

“The principal of self-defense, even involving weapons and bloodshed, has never been condemned, even by Gandhi who sanctioned it for those unable to master pure nonviolence... When the Negro uses force in self-defense he does not forfeit support—he may even win it, by the courage and self-respect it reflects.”

(I Have A Dream, p. 51)

While King and the SCLC encountered general apathy and cynicism towards adopting pacifism in the South, they found an openly hostile reception for it among Northern Blacks. In July 1964, rioting occurred in the Harlem and Brooklyn districts of New York, as well as Rochester. While King and other civil rights leaders downplayed their significance,

“SCLC could hardly ignore the riots, especially when King received a direct invitation from Robert Wagner, the mayor of New York, to attend a crisis meeting of black civic, political, and trade union leaders...

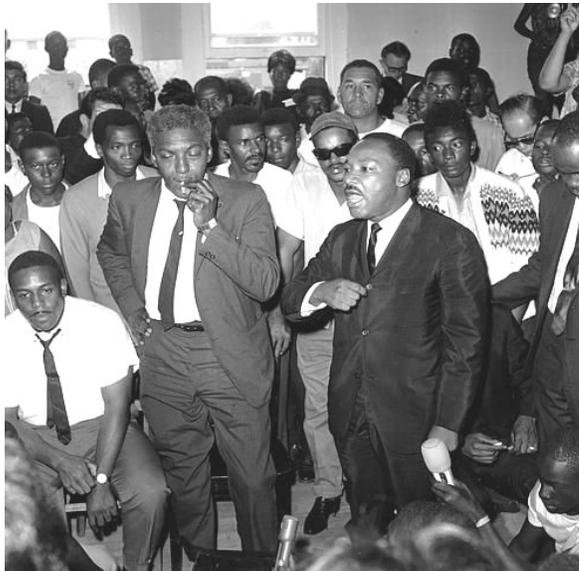
“The riots also led to SCLC's first attempt to work in a Northern city [Rochester, New York]... the city had seen some of the fiercest rioting: Governor Rockefeller had sent in the National Guard... King sent a seven-man team... But the SCLC staff members found it hard going: such was the hostility among young blacks to 'nonviolence' that the staff found it prudent not to mention the word. In a sermon at Rochester's Central Presbyterian Church, Young [SCLC's executive director] confessed that he represented 'a group [that] was as unpopular as anybody else... Nonviolence had been so misinterpreted in the Negro community of the North that to come as a member of a nonviolent movement... is to put two strikes on you to start with...'”

(To Redeem the Soul of America, pp. 196-97)

After the massive Watts, LA, riot of 1965, King found a similar hostile response to his pacifist doctrine:

“For many, the six days of lawlessness in Watts came as a 'bewildering surprise,' since it occurred only a week after the signing of the *Voting Rights Act* by President Johnson... [when King and another civil rights leader toured the area and advocated peace, they] were jeered and told to 'go back to the other side of town.'”

(Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream, p. 52)



King faces hostile crowd in Watts during 1965 riots.

In Chicago 1966, where the SCLC attempted to expand their base of operations (and tap into money allocated for the War on Poverty), staff members encountered similar hostility as had occurred in New York and Los Angeles. Black youth were “disdainful” and dismissive of pacifism. After several months of SCLC organizing in the ghetto, Chicago erupted in rioting throughout the month of July. King and the SCLC soon abandoned Chicago in defeat, failing to mobilize any base in the most oppressed Black communities in the city.

Two years later, Chicago would have one of the largest and best organized chapters of the Black Panther Party. Led by Fred Hampton, the Chicago chapter also succeeded in forming temporary alliances with local street gangs. The success of the Chicago chapter was only stopped with the December 4, 1969, assassination of Hampton by Chicago police.

The ability of the Panthers to organize in urban ghetto areas, where the SCLC had failed, underscores again the necessity for a diversity of tactics within movements.

King's Conflict with Militants

As noted, from the outset, King and other reformists had difficulty promoting the idea of nonviolent resistance. They also had to counter those who promoted militant resistance. In 1959, King wrote “The Social Organization of Nonviolence,” in which he attempted to dismiss the efforts of Robert Williams and others to establish armed self-defence units:

“There is more power in socially organized masses on the march than there is in guns in the hands of a few desperate men. Our enemies would prefer to deal with a small armed group than with a huge, unarmed but resolute mass of people.”

(I Have A Dream, p. 52)

Here, King adopts a common either/or position, neglecting to consider the possibility that both approaches might be necessary. Like other pacifist reformers, he cannot accept a diversity of tactics because he isn't thinking tactically, but rather ideologically. His main effort is to defend and argue his position, and undermine those of his political opponents. In reality, there were guns in the hands of a lot of desperate people, and the state would soon have

to contend with masses of them in urban rioting.

With the rupture of Birmingham in 1963 and an increasing acceptance of armed self-defence, there arose another obstacle to imposing pacifist doctrine on the movement: the emergence of Black Power and militant Black resistance. This internal struggle on tactics, strategies and objectives, became a bitter public debate between advocates of militant resistance and the pacifist reformers:

“The spread of the black power slogan during and after 1966 was, like the riots, a touchy issue for civil rights moderates. Established leaders feared... the possibility of a [white] backlash. More directly, many moderates were afraid of the damaging effect that the anti-white thrust of black power might have on their own relations with white supporters and allies... The NAACP's Roy Wilkin's called black power 'separatism... wicked fanaticism... ranging race against race... and in the end only black death.' Bayard Rustin argued that black power 'diverts the movement from any meaningful debate over strategy and tactics, it isolates the Negro community'... A group of mainstream civil rights leaders took out a large advertisement in *The New York Times*, which stated in part: 'We repudiate any strategies of violence, reprisal or vigilantism, and we condemn both the rioting and demagoguery that feeds it.'”

(*Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream*, p. 65)

It is worth noting some of the critiques King, and others, directed against the concept of revolutionary violence that began to gain acceptance. In August 1967, King addressed a conference of the SCLC in Atlanta, Georgia, with a speech entitled “Where Do We Go From Here?”:

“When one tries to pin down advocates of violence as to what acts would be effective, the answers are blatantly illogical. Sometimes they talk of overthrowing racist state and local governments and they talk about guerrilla warfare. They fail to see that no internal revolution has ever succeeded in overthrowing a government by violence unless the government had already lost the allegiance and effective control of its armed forces. Anyone in his right mind knows that this will not happen in the US... Furthermore, few if any violent revolutions have been successful unless the violent minority had the sympathy and support of the... majority. Castro may have had only a few Cubans actually fighting with him up in the hills, but he could never have overthrown the Batista regime unless he had the sympathy of the vast majority of Cuban people.”

(*I Have A Dream*, p. 175)

Perhaps unknown to King at the time, the US

military was in fact experiencing growing rebellion and mutiny within its own ranks. Hundreds of Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) and officers were killed in “fragging” incidents (so-called because of the use of fragmentation grenades), entire units refused to enter combat, and soldiers began adopting techniques to purposely avoid combat while on patrol. Underground newspapers circulated, advocating both attacks on officers as well as open rebellion. This growing insubordination was especially strong among Black soldiers, who, along with other people of colour, provided a disproportionate number of frontline troops.



Soldiers give Black Power salute during Vietnam War.

“Between 1969 and 1971, according to Congressional data, the total number of fragging incidents... was 730, and 83 officers were killed...”

(*10,000 Day War*, p. 271)

These statistics did not include attacks involving rifles and knives. According to a 1971 report by US Colonel Robert Heinl,

“By every conceivable indicator, our army that now remains in Vietnam is in a state approaching

collapse with individual units avoiding or having refused combat, murdering their officers and NCOs, drug-ridden and dispirited where not near-mutinous.”

(*10,000 Day War*, p. 279)

By 1973, most US ground troops had been removed from Vietnam, and it would take over a decade for the US military to recover. Here, King is not thinking strategically but, once again, ideologically. But this itself is a result of his objective; King did not seek to overthrow the government but was instead a collaborator who was dependent on the state and sought to maintain its overall legitimacy.

In the same 1967 speech, King minimized the effects rioting had had on government policies:

“Occasionally Negroes contend that the 1965 Watts riot and the other riots in various cities represented effective civil rights action. But those who express this view always end up with stumbling words when asked what concrete gains have been won as a result. At best, the riots have produced a little additional antipoverty money allotted by frightened government officials... It is something like improving the food in prison while the people remain securely incarcerated behind bars. Nowhere have the riots won any concrete improvement such as have the organized protest demonstrations.”

(*I Have A Dream*, p. 174)

This is clearly disingenuous, however: the Birmingham riots and subsequent uprisings were the

major catalyst for government constitutional reform (i.e., the 1964 Civil Rights Act) along with massive government funding via the 'War on Poverty,' directly primarily at Blacks in urban ghettos—the base of the riots (and from which the SCLC and other groups profited).

Ironically, it was the nonviolent protests that had achieved little more than “improving the food in prison,” while the people remained securely oppressed.

In his 1963 “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” King described the two opposing tendencies within the movement and promoted himself as a middle-man between two extremes (just as Gandhi had):

“One is a force of complacency made up of Negroes... in the middle class who, because of a degree of academic and economic security... have unconsciously become insensitive to the problems of the masses. The other force is one of bitterness and hatred... It is expressed in the various black nationalist groups that are springing up over the nation... I have tried to stand between these two forces... There is the more excellent way of love and nonviolent protest.”

(I Have A Dream, p. 93)

In the same letter, King rationalized his nonviolent campaigns as a safety valve for the anger and frustration inherent in Black communities as a result of their oppression, similar to Gandhi's own assertions that nonviolence helped to blunt the progress of militants:

“The Negro has many pent-up resentments and latent frustrations. He has to get them out. So let him march sometimes; let him have his prayer pilgrimages to the city hall; understand why he must have sit-ins and freedom rides. If his repressed emotions do not come out in these nonviolent ways, they will come out in ominous expressions of violence.”

(I Have A Dream, p. 94)

In another article, “Nonviolence: The Only Road To Freedom,” published in 1966 in *Ebony*, the SCLC's magazine, King argued in defence of pacifism as the key to Black assimilation to US society:

“The American racial revolution has been a revolution to 'get in' rather than overthrow. We want a share in the American economy, the housing market, the

educational system and the social opportunities. This goal itself indicates that a social change in America must be nonviolent.

“If one is in search of a better job, it does no help to burn down the factory. If one needs more adequate education, shooting the principal will not help, or if housing is the goal, only building and construction will produce that end. To destroy anything, person or property, can't bring us closer to the goal that we seek.”

(I Have A Dream, p. 130)

King was also quite clear about the mainstream movement's relationship with the government, seemingly unaware of why the state might be backing them:

“So far, we have had the Constitution backing most of the demands for change, and this has made our work easier, since we could be sure that the federal courts would usually back up our demonstrations legally.”

(I Have A Dream, p. 131)

He was also an early promoter of the pacifist mythology that nonviolent protest alone achieved civil rights:

“The power of the nonviolent march is indeed a mystery. It is always surprising that a few hundred Negroes marching can produce such a reaction across the nation.”

(I Have A Dream, p. 132)

Of course, it wasn't just a “few hundred Negroes marching” that produced a reaction, but the appearance of large-scale violence and resistance by Blacks. Stokely Carmichael criticized the role of liberals, such as King, in his 1969 article “The Pitfalls of Liberalism”:

“Many people want to know why... we want to criticize the liberals. We want to criticize them because they represent the liaison between both groups, between the oppressed and the oppressor. The liberal tries to become an arbitrator, but he is incapable of solving the problems. He promises the oppressor that he can keep the oppressed under control; that he will stop them from becoming illegal (in this case illegal means violent). At the same time, he promises the oppressed that he will be able to alleviate their suffering—in due time. Historically, of course, we know this is impossible, and our era will not escape history.”

(Stokely Speaks, p. 166)



Watts revolt, 1965: cop car caught in riot.



Stokely Carmichael.

In the same article, he later states:

“The liberal is so preoccupied with stopping confrontation that he usually finds himself defending and calling for law and order, the law and order of the oppressor. Confrontation would disrupt the smooth functioning of the society and so the politics of the liberal leads him into a position where he finds himself politically aligned with the oppressor rather than with the oppressed.

“The reason the liberal seeks to stop confrontation... is that his role, regardless of what he says, is really to maintain the status quo, rather than to change it. He enjoys economic stability from the status quo and if he fights for change he is risking his economic stability...”

(Stokely Speaks, 170)

State Co-optation of the Civil Rights Movement

“Nonviolent direct action did not threaten the interests of the corporate class in the same way it threatened those of the Kennedy administration. To be sure, the spectre of a demonstration in front of one's factory or a boycott of one's store might be enough to prompt a given business to yield to protester's demands. But in the North, direct action was not enough to force large concessions or to prompt corporate powerholders on a national level to become either official or unofficial sponsors of change. Riots, however, were another matter. If the cities burned, as McGeorge Bundy of the Ford Foundation noted in an address to the National Urban League convention in 1966, 'the white man's companies will have to take the losses.' Urban violence and the black power ideologies which seemed to fuel it hit American business leaders in a spot where nonviolent direct action had not: their collective economic interests. Consequently, an unprecedented collective response emerged from the top of the economic structure during the late 1960s. The largest corporations and charitable foundations in the US began to 'invest' in racial reform and civil rights.”

(Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream, p. 179)

“Did the black rioting in Birmingham—trivial by the standard of Watts and Detroit [the following years], but serious in the context of the

early 1960s—weaken the effectiveness of SCLC's campaign? Given the administrations deep fear of domestic violence and disorder, it may well have actually helped. The Birmingham riots raised the spectre of black retaliation, of a violent black revolt... This prospect frightened and appalled the Kennedy's. Robert, in particular, feared that nonviolent protest might give way to the violent tactics of irresponsible extremists. As he told a group of Alabama newspaper editors on May 15, 'Remember, it was King who went around the pool halls and door to door collecting knives, telling people to go home and to stay off the streets and to be nonviolent... If King loses, worse leaders are going to take his place.

“That was precisely the argument which King made so forcefully in ‘Letter from a Birmingham Jail.’ If whites remained obdurate to the reasonable demands of nonviolent leaders, he warned, 'millions of Negroes will... seek solace and security in black-nationalist ideology...’”

(To Redeem the Soul of America, p. 136)

The quotes above show the symbiotic relationship between reformists and the state: the reformists need the state to enact and enforce reforms in order to remain credible, the state needs the reformists to counter the radicals, and in this way maintain its credibility as a democratic institution.

As noted, the US government actively supported and promoted the nonviolent civil rights movement. And it did so because it feared a more dangerous alternative: militant Black resistance and escalating social conflict, not only in the segregated South but across the country.

This strategy is known as *co-optation*, and is accomplished through official state support provided to reformist movements or leaders. This includes high profile meetings with movement leaders, public statements promoting them, extensive media coverage, providing funding and other resources, and limiting repression against them. Ultimately, co-



King shares a laugh with President John F. Kennedy, 1963.



King and other civil rights leaders meet with President Lyndon Johnson, 1964.

option involves some level of collaboration.

While the state promoted the Black civil right's movement, it demonized and criminalized the militant Black resistance, repressing it with deadly force when necessary (i.e., the FBI's Cointel-Pro campaign against the Black Panthers, which resulted in scores being killed and hundreds imprisoned, as did military repression of urban rebellions during the 1960s).

This dual strategy was the same as that used by the British in India. A more recent version of this was outlined by Frank Kitson in the early 1970s. Kitson was a British Army officer who had extensive experience in counter-insurgency operations in Kenya, Aden, Malaya, and Northern Ireland. He offered advice on how governments should counter mass movements that have not yet developed into armed insurrections:

"In practical terms the most promising line of approach lies in separating the mass of those engaged in the campaign from the leadership by the promise of concessions... It is most important to do 3 things quickly.

"The first is to implement the promised concessions so as to avoid allegations of bad faith which may enable the subversive leadership to regain control over sections of the people.

"The second is to discover and neutralize the genuine subversive element.

"The third is to associate as many prominent members of the population, especially those who have engaged in non-violent action, with the government. This last technique is known in America as co-optation and is described... as drowning the revolution in baby's milk."

(*Low-Intensity Conflict*, p. 87-88).

We can see from the history of the Civil Rights Movement that the state, once it realized the extent of the crisis, enacted various reforms in accord with those demanded by the movement. Once a militant movement had begun to manifest itself, the US government then sought to neutralize this threat while redoubling its efforts to promote the reformists, and at the same time associating prominent members of it with the state.

In January 1957, for example, following the establishment of the SCLC, King was on the cover of *Time* magazine.

"Further confirmation of King's status as a 'national' leader came in June 1958, when he met President Eisenhower as part of a black delegation."

(*To Redeem the Soul of America*, p. 42)

King frequently met and conferred with Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, as well as other White House officials, including Robert Kennedy, the US attorney general from 1960-64. The Kennedy's in particular provided considerable support to King and the Civil Rights Movement, and especially after the 1963 Birmingham riots. They also used their influence to direct the movement into electoral politics and litigation (as the British had done with Gandhi).

An example of the role of the Kennedy administration in directly co-opting the Civil Rights Movement (along with other measures), was the Voter Education Project:

"The mechanism through which President Kennedy, his brother, and their staffs sought to encourage the civil rights movement to shift from demonstrations to voter registration was the Voter Education Project (VEP), which was announced in early 1962. Superficially, the VEP was a purely private operation, administered by the Southern Regional Council in Atlanta and funded by grants from several philanthropic foundations, principally the Taconic Foundation, the Field Foundation, and the Stern Family Fund... These fund were distributed to

other organizations, including CORE and SNCC, to pay the expenses of the registration drives in the Deep South... Harris Wofford, President Kennedy's civil rights advisor, maintains that the idea emerged at a June 1961 meeting of the Subcabinet Group on Civil Rights, an informal group of administration officials formed to coordinate and monitor racial progress... 'It was agreed,' he wrote, 'that if federal agencies took the initiative and used their full power to protect and promote equal rights, the necessity for popular pressure could be removed or at least reduced.'"

(*Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream*, p. 155)

In 1965, King received the Nobel Peace Prize, which significantly raised his status as a leader of the Civil Rights Movement, even though at this point it was virtually non-existent. The idea that King collaborated with the US government to blunt the emerging Black militancy was a publicly stated fact at the time. During the Selma campaign in 1965, a *New York Times* editorial,

"praised King as the symbol of 'mature responsible leadership which always seeks peaceful solutions through legal and political means,' adding a warning that 'young Negro hotheads' would be encouraged if he did not succeed."

(*To Redeem the Soul of America*, p. 247)



King & Senator Ed Kennedy share a moment.

King and the SCLC were well paid for their collaboration. According to Haines, the SCLC's funding rose from \$10,000 in 1958, to \$193,000 in 1961, to \$728,000 in 1963, and then to \$1,643,000 by 1965 (*Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream*, p. 84).

These increases in funding correspond to the years of increasing Black revolt, culminating in the 1964 'War on Poverty' funding and the Watts rebellion of 1965.

"In 1966-67, SCLC was awarded \$109,000 from the Department of Education; \$61,000 from the Department of Labor; and more than \$500,000 from the Office of Economic Opportunity."

(*To Redeem the Soul of America*, p. 367)

Nor was government funding limited to the SCLC. After 1964, increasing amounts of money were pumped into reformist organizations in order to expand their influence within Black communities, and, at the same time, to begin buying off as many activists at the grassroots level as possible.

"The period from 1964 through 1970 saw a vast expansion of federal welfare efforts, much of which was aimed at the urban black poor. The most significant aspect of this expansion was the declaration of a War on Poverty and the creation of the Office of Economic Opportunity."

(*Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream*, p. 145)

Some of the programs under the 'War on Poverty' included Job Corps, Neighbourhood Youth Corps, Head Start, a Community Action Program, educational programs, and other similar initiatives. Reformist organizations were contracted to run these programs and services. One of the main recipients of this funding was the National Urban League (NUL).

The National Urban League was founded in 1911 by wealthy Blacks and white philanthropists. It focused on housing and unemployment, and was essentially a social service organization. Although involved in some legal work on housing and locating jobs, the NUL was not an active component of the civil rights movement, although it participated. Described as one of weakest and most conciliatory of all the civil rights organizations, the NUL was also the main beneficiary of government and corporate funding that began flooding the movement during the 1960s:

"The greatest portion of the increased income came



King with Nobel peace prize, 1965.

from 'big money' sources: government agencies, corporations, and foundations. From the beginning, the NUL was quite dependent upon grants and donations from such foundations as the Rockefeller, Ford, and Rosenwald funds... Between 1961 and 1970, however, foundation contributions to the NUL increased from \$62,000 to over \$5 million. Somewhat less dramatic was the increase from \$70,000 in 1961 to \$1,973,000 in 1970. Governmental funds, however, made up the largest part of the League's windfall. During the mid-60s the NUL became a 'contractor' for social services... The first governmental funds

in 1966 amounted to only \$294,000 but by 1970 they had skyrocketed to nearly \$7 million..."

(*Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream*, p. 92)

Nor was this pacification program carried out by government and 'charitable' foundations alone. Major US corporations, headed by powerful members of the ruling class, were also involved:

"In the North as well as South, business interest in civil rights and other black concerns lay dormant until the crises of the 1960s... Through its Commerce and Industry Council, the League brought white business leaders into advisory positions in the organization; large firms such as General Motors, General Electric, Ford Motor Company, Standard Oil, and US Steel participated."

(*Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream*, p. 107)

Ultimately, the Black rebellion of the 1960s was not only drowned in 'baby's milk,' it was also drenched in the blood of hundreds of Blacks killed in riots, police shootings, and racist attacks. This deadly repression was part of a broader pacification effort that involved 'urban renewal' projects—the destruction of ghetto apartment blocks and the dispersal of their residents to other areas more

easily policed.

At the same time, the state handed out millions of dollars to reformist leaders and directed them into the ghettos as part of the pacification effort. For their part, reformists willingly played the role of social reformer and collaborated in the state's effort to stop any movement towards radical social change. This collaborative and counter-revolutionary role remains an inherent part of reformist movements to this day.



Fred Hampton, Black Panther killed by police, Dec. 1969

Conclusion

Pacifism must be challenged and discredited as an acceptable doctrine for resistance movements. To promote nonviolence is to disarm the people psychologically and to dampen their fighting spirit. This is even more so when the population is already largely pacified, as is the case in North America. Pacified not through state repression, but through apathy and hopelessness, and when these are broken, by the preachings of a pacifist doctrine that claims to be morally, politically, and tactically superior to all other forms of struggle.

Despite claims of victories in India by Gandhi, and the Southern US by Martin Luther King, the two main pillars of pacifist mythology, history shows that both these struggles were the result of a *diversity of tactics*, including armed resistance, revolts and riots.

By reviewing the history of Gandhi and King, and the respective movements they were a part of, there are some conclusions that can be reached which apply to pacifist movements in general:

Pacifism is without doubt a *middle-class* phenomenon. Both Gandhi and King were from the middle-class, as were their political allies and benefactors. This class background influenced their political goals and methods. This tendency can also be seen in current nonviolent movements, whether they are Indigenous, women, environmental, etc.

Pacifism is a *reformist* movement. Despite some claims of revolutionary goals, non-violent movements advocate legal and constitutional means to achieve change. Any use of civil disobedience or mass mobilizing is simply a means to these ends. The types of reforms sought reflect the self-interest of the middle-class, including greater economic and political power. These are threatened when there is class war and revolution, and in this way their interests are closely bound with those of the ruling class in maintaining the status quo.

Pacifism is without doubt a *religious* doctrine. Gandhi devised his pacifism from a mish-mash of Hindu and Christian beliefs. Gandhi's pacifism was not simply a tactic to use in struggle, but the basis of a new religion in which nonviolence was a way of life (the *satyagraha*, meaning "truth struggle," or "soul-force"). King, a Baptist preacher, naturally adopted this same logic. Even when minimizing the religious rationale for nonviolence, today's pacifists continue to use the same methods.

Due to official support, greater resources, and an inherent tendency towards authoritarian measures (arrogance derived from religious motivation and class privilege), middle-class pacifists are often able to gain control of movements and to impose their doctrine over others.

As we enter a period of greater social conflict and revolts occurring around the world, it is vital that radicals be able to counter the mythology of pacifism and show that the two main struggles around which it is based, Indian independence and Black civil rights, were achieved by using a diversity of tactics. Furthermore, that this diversity of tactics was the result of a diversity of social groups being mobilized (i.e., King's inability to organize northern ghetto youth, who responded favourably to the Black Panther Party).

Nonviolence is used by middle-class reformists to ensure any mobilization does not lead to resistance or revolution, while enabling them to achieve their goals. The state frequently works with reformist leaders to co-opt the movement

and use it against radicals. It is a mistake to believe that reformists have the same goal as radicals but simply choose to use other means. As can be seen by history, their collaboration with the state, and their class self-interest, makes reformist movements *counterrevolutionary* by nature.

Despite this, the intentions of many *participants* in reformist movements are not those of counter-revolution, but rather that of progress and social upliftment. Many are not even thinking long-term or about the need for radical social change. Instead, they are drawn into single-issue movements out of a desire to see an end to a certain injustice, or to save a certain area of land, etc. Although naive and inexperienced, they are generally well-intentioned.

While the title of this writing is *Smash Pacifism*, it is not intended as a call to violence against pacifists. Rather, it symbolizes the need to resolutely challenge the doctrine of pacifism that is so routinely imposed on social movements and to break the monopoly on forms of struggle which reformist organizations presently hold. In this way, it is intended as a resource to be used in our organizing efforts alongside people who have accepted pacifist doctrine largely out of ignorance. ★



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