

The Anarchist Library  
Anti-Copyright



# Anarchism and Non-Violence

John Whitfield

May 1963

John Whitfield  
Anarchism and Non-Violence  
May 1963

Retrieved on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2020 from  
<https://libcom.org/library/anarchism-non-violence>  
First published in *Anarchy* #027: Talking About Youth

**[theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org)**

NON-VIOLENCE IS NOT THE SAME AS PACIFISM, the latter is anti-war and deals with international relations, It does not, as a code, affect the whole of life, though it may do so as a result of individual conduct. My aim is to put political and private morality on the same basis, or to deal with life as a whole. Politics is a seemingly impersonal and vast form of personal relationships, This difference of degree is treated by our culture as a difference in kind, and the results are total war and totalitarian states.

Max Weber, in his lecture, 'Politics as a vocation,' given in Munich in 1918, classifies ethical systems into two groups; the 'ethic of responsibility' and the 'ethic of ultimate ends.' The latter involves a near complete disregard of the immediate effects of one's actions, which are in accord with one's absolute *morality*, or ultimate ends. This implies a decision about what is 'good' and a faith that all is well, if only this 'good' is followed. The former is more complicated. Weber accepted the dominant thought of his time concerning means and ends. He found it possible to distinguish between them, and did not find

them intrinsically related. This enabled him to accept that 'evil' means must be used to achieve 'good' ends, Responsibility for him means foreseeing the immediate effect of one's actions and accounting for them, but also and more importantly, the need to be politically effective. This involves violence, which he accepts as 'evil'.

That is, briefly, how Weber saw the topic of politics and its dependence on power, and, therefore, violence. Whether or not this was true in 1918, it is not true now, Waging war for political ends in an age of nuclear weapons and I.C.B.M.'s cannot be responsible either in Weber's terms or in everyday terms. To go from this position of pacifism to one of a non-violent society is more difficult. The existence of totalitarian states, and the growing power of the executive in our own 'free' society are indications that authority, dependent as it always has been, on violence, is being abused. The complexity of life leads people to surrender willingly their own responsibility and to place their trust in the state. The infamous assumption of modern thought that the state must not be, on any account, defied is evidence that as we surrender more to the state, so it makes yet greater demands on us.

The need to defy the state is evident, and the need to avoid violence because of what it brings and its incompatibility with our ends, is also there. This claim can be made from the trite assertion that we cannot force people to be free. Coercion does not achieve our ends, as it only leads to the replacement of one tyranny by another. It is only necessary to look at the Russian Revolution of 1917 to see an example of this. Hatred is increased by violence, making a complete solution impossible and laying the ground for a counter-revolution.

Since Weber lectured, there have been successful non-violent campaigns that have been politically effective, and yet in accord with the aim of a free society. The satyakraha campaigns, the Montgomery bus boycott, the Japanese agitation against the U.S. Security Pact are all examples of

effective campaigns, legal and illegal. Power this is, but it is not dependent on violence, as Weber thought it must be.

Weber said that a man who is not a 'political infant' had to achieve a compromise between the two ethics but gave no indication of how this was done. He also admitted that men did say, 'Here I stand. I must be faithful to my morality' in the face of denying the responsibility ethic. As to when this point is reached, Weber again gave no indication, nor did he offer any solution. I hold that non-violent campaigns are a solution at this point. I also hold that they show that Weber's ideas are now wrong, as a combination of his two ethics is achieved all along the line, and no compromise is needed.

What are the possible results of this rethinking of politics? Internationally, the results must be evident to anyone who supports CND and wishes to replace old policies with new, effective ones, as he must do. Socially, the implication is of far greater individual responsibility and of the removal of political oppression. The adoption of an aggressive non-violent policy of social change would both cause, and be caused by, the former. It would be used to remove political oppression, and would thus remove the need for political oppression as the oppressing authority would lead to the removal of the other forms of oppression. Among these is economic oppression which is important in our society, and far less obvious than political oppression. The recent dismissal of seventeen Ford strike leaders is an exception to the rule of unobtrusiveness, but not to the rule of effectiveness.

Does this lead to an anarchist society? What I mean by an anarchist society is not what most of those who also call themselves anarchists mean. Even so, it does lead to a free society, and the name is irrelevant. On the grounds that I have outlined above, I consider there to be a need for both a free society and a non-violent society. I think that I have shown there to be a correlation between the two, and also that there is an answer. I believe that a synthesis of the classical anarchist ideas and the

ideas of non-violence is necessary before the answer is given a form clearer than the one I have reached. There is great scope for a new, dynamic and effective political philosophy to be developed.