

WATCHING BRIEF- WB17-1: SOCIAL DEFENCE

As Quakers we seek a world without war. We seek a sustainable and just community. We have a vision of an Australia that upholds

This report is in part a response to the increasing militarization of our world, and the well-entrenched assumption that military defence is the best way (and ultimately the only effective way) to prevent an attack from an outside invader or an internal insurgency. Many people now see the need to abolish war, yet find it hard to envision alternatives. Social Defence has been neglected as a viable option for defending a country or community. Details of its origins and potential are included to help readers identify where it is relevant to current debates on foreign and defence policy. Some further information is included about ways in which social defence approaches can link with other work to abolish war.

What is Social Defence?

Social defence is also known as civilian-based defence, and can be defined as “defence by civilians (as distinct from military and paramilitary means) using civilian means of struggle to deter and defeat foreign military invasions, occupations, and internal usurpations. (Gene Sharp, 1990).

An alternative definition is offered by Brian Martin, an Australian specialist:

“Social defence is a nonviolent alternative to military defence. It is based on widespread protest, persuasion, noncooperation and intervention in order to oppose military aggression or political repression”. (Brian Martin, 1991).

Such defence is based on the following characteristics:

- The whole population and institutions are involved in actively defending the country.
- Methods include psychological, economic, social and political resistance.
- Advance preparation occurs by way of training in forms of resistance and non-cooperation.
- The aim is to undermine the invading force so as to make it impossible for it to rule.

Specific types of action have been listed by Gene Sharp as:

- **Symbolic actions**, including:
formal statements (speeches, letters, petitions);
slogans, leaflets, banners;
demonstrations, protest marches, vigils, pickets;
wearing of symbols of opposition

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(such as the paper clips worn by Norwegian civilians during the Nazi occupation); meetings, teach-ins.

- **Noncooperation**, including:
 - social boycott, stay-at-home;
 - boycotts by consumers, workers, traders; embargoes;
 - strikes, bans, working-to-rule, reporting "sick";
 - refusal to pay tax or debts, withdrawal of bank deposits;
 - boycotts of government institutions;
 - disobedience, evasions and delays;
 - mock incapability ("go slow", "misunderstandings", "mistakes").
- **Intervention and alternative institutions**, including:
 - fasts;
 - sit-ins, nonviolent obstruction and occupation;
 - sabotage (such as destruction of information and records);
 - establishment of parallel institutions for government, media, transport, welfare, health and education.

History of Social Defence

Brian Martin (Wollongong University) summarises the development as follows:

The idea of nonviolent resistance to aggression can be traced to a number of writers, including Henry David Thoreau, Leo Tolstoy, Elihu Burritt (a Christian pacifist), William James and Bertrand Russell. The campaigns led by Gandhi in South Africa and India were important in developing the idea of a nonviolent alternative to war. Gandhi himself began advocating defence by nonviolent resistance in the 1930s. A number of writers were inspired by Gandhi and developed his ideas. In the 1930s, advocates of a nonviolent substitute for war included Richard Gregg, Bart de Ligt, Kenneth Boulding, Jessie Wallace Hughan and Krishnalal Shridharani.

Perhaps the first fully-fledged description of a national social defence system was by Stephen King-Hall, a British writer and former naval officer, in his book *Defence in the Nuclear Age* published in 1958. King-Hall thought that British parliamentary democracy could be better defended from communism if the military were abolished and replaced by organised nonviolent resistance. King-Hall's treatment moved social defence onto the agenda as a pragmatic rather than just a moral alternative.

Shortly after this, the idea of social defence was developed by various researchers including Theodor Ebert in West Germany, Johan Galtung in Norway, Adam Roberts in Britain and Gene Sharp in the United States. Since then, these and other researchers have worked on the idea, inspired both by historical writing about nonviolent struggles and by contemporary use of nonviolent action in a variety of campaigns.

Examples of Effective Social Defence

- The Kapp Putsch in Berlin in 1920, when a would-be dictator and his private army tried to take over. The previous government fled, but the citizens and government officials made governing impossible, and the takeover collapsed within a week.
- Gandhi's resistance movement against British occupation of India. This was a comprehensive strategy that ultimately led to independence.
- In Algeria in 1961 some French soldiers seized power to oppose moves to independence. Trade unions, political parties led a general strike, and many soldiers would not assist the coup. It collapsed within a week.
- When French and Belgian troops occupied Germany's Ruhr area in 1923, there was strong resistance by both government and citizens using rallies, boycotts, sabotage, and strikes. Ultimately resistance ended but the French people's outrage led to the fall of their government in 1924.

- When the Czech government eased some repressive measures in 1968, Soviet troops invaded. There was spontaneous nonviolent response, including talking to Soviet troops about reasons for the resistance. As a result some concessions were made and troops withdrawn.
- In Iran in 1978-9 the Shah's repressive regime was toppled without arms. When protesters were shot by troops, the resistance increased. The economy stalled through protest action by workers. The new regime became autocratic, but the example of nonviolent resistance was powerful.

These examples show the potential for nonviolent social defence in a variety of situations. As with violence, however, nonviolence may or may not be effective in all situations.

Analysis

Gene Sharp (US writer on nonviolence) in 1985 spoke of the failure of past approaches to peace and the abolition of war, and outlined civilian-based defence as drawing upon the well-established techniques of nonviolent struggle. "This would be waged by a trained civilian population on the basis of advance preparations and contingency plans against foreign conventional military attacks and internal usurpations. This substitute policy would aim to make the populace unrulable by the attackers and to deny the latter their objectives". He envisaged a program of 'transarmament' in which would replace the existing military defence system with a civilian-based one.

Brian Martin (Wollongong University) has studied intensively the theories and use of social defence. In his various writings on the subject, he has delved into the implications of different approaches to defence. He has identified some specific features of military defence that are problematic, especially in today's world:

- Military forces have the potential to attack as well as defend, and can therefore be threatening to other nations.
- Modern weapons have much greater destructive power on people and the environment.
- The emphasis on military preparedness can create conditions for their use.
- Military defence places responsibility for defence with an elite group rather than engaging the whole community.
- Military forces can be turned on their own people in a repressive way.
- Reliance on military forces generates arms races.

Brian Martin offers these reflections on social defence:

Getting rid of the military, and instead preparing the population to be able to defend against external threats, would help empower citizens with the understandings and skills to tackle oppression at home. Furthermore, getting rid of the military means removing the ultimate defender of the state.

The radical potential of social defence suggests why it has been neglected. Governments do not want to empower their own citizens in ways that might be used against governments themselves. Corporate leaders would have similar concerns, and military commanders do not want to be made redundant. There seems to be no major government, corporate or professional organisation that has a particular interest in promoting a people's alternative to the military.

Thinking of social defence as empowering people to be able to challenge unjust rule helps explain the trajectory of nonviolent movements. Skills in nonviolent action have a radical potential. How can an empowered population be controlled, if at all?

Sharon Callaghan, from the Schweik Action group (Wollongong) outlined in 2001 a feminist perspective on nonviolent action in relation to civilian defence:

- There is genuine participation by all members of the group.
- Decision-making takes into account the strengths and skills of members of the group.
- Alliances and friendships are the foundation of long-term networks characterised by trust and solidarity.
- Leadership is based on accountability, consultation and participation.
- Language is inclusive, non-sexist, non-racist and non-aggressive.
- Theatre and art are used to add a further dimension to the movement.
- A combination of methods works best – communication, education, rallies, boycotts, meetings.
- Process is as important as outcome, and training needs to include how to handle differences during a campaign.

This approach reflect wider analysis of the failure of current ways to achieve defence and security. Celia McKeon (Rowntree Trust, UK) gave a TED talk in June 2015 on ‘Reimagining Security’ and highlighted the following:

- Peace and security are built upon dialogue rather than military force.
- Interdependence, co-operation and mutual respect are the basis of human security.
- The real threats to human security are in areas of poverty, inequality, health, environment, food and income.
- Power today is dominated by vested interests that thrive on fear.
- Vulnerability is the way to peace – by taking the risk of reaching out to others to share responsibility for common problems.

The US-based group World Beyond War Makes the following points about a nonviolent alternative to military defence:

- All adults can be trained in methods of nonviolence, sending a clear message to potential invaders that there is a nation-wide network of resistance.
- The cost would be much less than the military system.
- Such an approach would be based on participation and transparency.

The Ammerdown Group in UK brings together practitioners and academics to consider new ways of achieving security, akin to social defence. Its report ‘Rethinking Security’ (May 2016) said that security must be grounded in the wellbeing of people, and this involves a collective effort based on (a) security as freedom from fear and want, (b) security as a common right, (c) security as a patient practice, and (d) security as a shared responsibility. This approach meshes well with the idea that social defence requires careful building of structures and processes for mutual support and understanding.

Quaker George Lakey, a long-time specialist on nonviolence, has said that “If the peace movements of Japan, Israel and the United States choose to build on a half century strategy work and devise a serious alternative to war, they will certainly build in preparation and training and gain the attention of pragmatists in their societies”.

It is worth noting that some countries already have limited or no military forces. Some – Costa Rica, Haiti and Grenada – have actually gone through a process of demilitarisation. Others such as Samoa were formed without armed forces, partly because of their dependence on another nation (New Zealand) for defence. It is interesting that Costa Rica stands high on the list of environmental sustainability (5th in the world and first in all the Americas) according to Yale University’s Environmental Performance Index (2012), and this may be assisted by the absence of large defence expenditure.

War Resisters International, in an article in 1991, outlined the concept of 'transarmament' - the process of converting from military to civilian defence. Among the points they made were:

- Military means can only be abandoned after civilian-based defence capabilities are in place.
- Human nature does not need to be change as a pre-condition.
- A trans-partisan approach – drawing in people of different political views – has the best potential to achieve wide acceptance.
- Adoption of civilian-based defence is possible more easily by smaller countries that have no viable military alliance.
- Even countries with military defence could prepare for situations of overwhelming invasion by including a civilian-based policy.
- Neighbouring countries could assist each other in adopting civilian-based defence planning.

Robert Burrowes, a long-time Australian peace activist, has spent much time on refining the theory and practice of nonviolent defence. He says on his website:

This website is designed to teach you how to plan and implement a nonviolent strategy to defend against a foreign invading power or a political/military coup, or to liberate your country from a dictatorship or a foreign occupation...I learned much from an extensive study of Mohandas K. Gandhi and his nonviolent campaigns: Gandhi was an intuitive strategic thinker of remarkable capacity. Ironically, perhaps, I also learned a great deal from the military strategist Carl von Clausewitz, who understood strategic theory and elaborated a conception of strategy based on that understanding....The strategy presented here is not, on the whole, complicated but it does require someone (and preferably a group) who is willing to think and act strategically: to carefully develop a strategic plan and then, just as carefully, to implement it.

Robert has identified a number of significant components of a strategy – organisation, leadership, communication, preparations, constructive program, strategic timeframe, tactics and peacekeeping, evaluation.

Conclusion

It is timely to raise within the public debate/dialogue the option of a different approach to defence and foreign policy. Those seeking to abolish war as a destructive part of our world can put forward social defence as a vision of what might be achieved in a co-operative way within societies and communities. It would also offer an end to the limitless costs of military defence, and a new way of engaging people in shared responsibility for defending the place which they call home.

Friends are encouraged to add the ideas of social to defence to their own circle of contacts, to help widen the options for changing current priorities in defence and security. QPLC will seek ways to inject these approaches into the peace movement's discussions about alternative foreign and defence policies for Australia.

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