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Brian Martin
University of Wollongong, bmartin@uow.edu.au

W. Varney
University of Wollongong, wvarney@uow.edu.au

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Nonviolence and Communication

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BRIAN MARTIN AND WENDY VARNEY

Science, Technology and Society, University of Wollongong

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Abstract

Communication is central to the effectiveness of nonviolent action: methods of protest and persuasion are essentially means of communication, while methods of noncooperation and nonviolent intervention have crucial communicative dimensions. As a mode of political communication, nonviolence can be contrasted with rational dialogue, electoral politics and violence, and stands out from them in combining high transformative potential with dialogue and participation. The more well studied dimensions of nonviolence as communication are dialogue with opponents, power equalization to prepare for dialogue, and mobilization of third parties. To these should be added two further dimensions, collective and individual empowerment. Two cases of nonviolent resistance in the Soviet Union - the 1991 coup and the 1953 prison camp strikes at Norilsk and Vorkuta - are used to illustrate the dimensions of nonviolence as communication in practice. These examples reveal the importance of communication in nonviolent action. They also suggest the difficulty in gaining information on empowerment, especially individual empowerment, which may be one reason why these dimensions have been neglected. The five-dimension framework of nonviolence as communication has the limitation that many actions mix two or more dimensions. Examining the communicative dimensions of nonviolence can alert both activists and researchers to the fact that nonviolent actions do not 'speak for themselves'.

Introduction

The briefest examination of nonviolent action reveals that communication is essential to its effectiveness. A number of methods of nonviolent action, such as organizing petitions, holding

rallies and wearing symbols of resistance, are means of communicating both the activists' concerns and their willingness to express them. Gene Sharp (1973) classifies methods of nonviolence into three categories: nonviolent protest and persuasion; noncooperation; and intervention. All the methods that he categorizes as protest and persuasion can be interpreted as forms of communication. Methods of noncooperation, which include numerous types of strikes and boycotts, also have powerful communicative roles, to both opponents and third parties, by demonstrating willingness to act. Methods of intervention, such as sit-ins and fasts, have similar communicative functions.

Considering the importance of communication to nonviolence, it is surprising that nonviolence researchers have so rarely used communication perspectives. Likewise, communication researchers have not examined nonviolent action, at least not with any explicit awareness of nonviolence theory. [1] In this article, we take a preliminary look at how communication perspectives can be used to offer insight into nonviolence theory and practice.

We begin by discussing the communicative aspects of the two main nonviolence traditions, namely principled nonviolence epitomized by Gandhi and pragmatic nonviolence epitomized by Sharp. Then we compare nonviolent action with three other modes of political communication - rational discourse, electoral politics and violence - in order to assess the special characteristics of nonviolence as communication. Next we examine several different dimensions of nonviolence as communication: persuasion of opponents, power equalization, dialogue among nonviolent activists, mobilization of third parties, and self-transformation. To illustrate the role of these dimensions in practice, we examine two instances of nonviolent action in the Soviet Union, resistance to the 1991 coup and strikes at Norilsk and Vorkuta prison camps in 1953.

Communication in Nonviolent Action

The theory and practice of nonviolent action can be conveniently divided into two traditions: principled nonviolence (often called satyagraha) and pragmatic nonviolence (Burrowes, 1996: 112-115; Stiehm, 1968). In principled nonviolence, refusal to use violence is a moral imperative, based for example on the sanctity of human life. Gandhi is the most prominent figure from this tradition, which can be traced back to Leo Tolstoy and others (Bondurant, 1958; Gandhi, 1927/1929; Gregg, 1934; Shridharani, 1939). Given that behaving morally is central to this approach, the effectiveness of nonviolent action is a secondary consideration, but important nevertheless. Gandhi, an astute practitioner (Sharp, 1979), argued that nonviolent action worked through the process of conversion: satyagrahis (principled nonviolent activists), demonstrating their commitment by refusing to fight back against attacks, would 'melt the hearts' of their opponents. Since principled nonviolence is founded in a belief that behaviour flows out of the core values of a person, it is only sensible to conclude that conversion - namely, changing the opponents' core values - is the mechanism by which nonviolent action should bring about change.

If conversion is the means, then communication is essential; Ramana Murti (1968) goes further and says that nonviolence *is* communication. The calm perseverance of satyagrahis in the face of brutal assault can lead to attackers reassessing their own values, but of course this requires that the attackers actually perceive the behaviour of the satyagrahis. Pilots in a plane dropping bombs, or scientists designing the bombs, are unlikely to see protesters at all. But more than information flow is required: as well, the activists' behaviour must create or resonate with opponents' understandings, [2] otherwise there is no prospect of conversion. If the activists are seen as behaving stupidly or bizarrely, there is little prospect of understanding or sympathy by the opponents. In communicative terms, a requirement for the effectiveness of nonviolent action is that channels are open and that relevant meanings are produced.

While there are certainly some individual cases of conversion through nonviolent action, evidence

for conversion as a general process is absent. Thomas Weber (1993) analysed the case of Gandhi's salt satyagraha of 1930, in which satyagrahis meekly endured brutal assaults by police wielding wooden batons. But this did not lead the police assaulters to alter their beliefs. If anything, the acquiescence of the satyagrahis made them become more ferocious in attack. The effectiveness of the campaign came from another communicative process. Western journalist Webb Miller reported on the campaign for an international audience; information about the attacks caused outrage in countries such as Britain and the United States. The nonviolent action thus had its biggest impact on third parties - those not directly involved in the confrontation - via messages produced by an observer. From Weber's analysis it can be concluded that communication was central to Gandhi's successes, but that it was not primarily through what Gandhi thought was the central means, conversion, but rather through mobilization of third party opinion.

The second main tradition, pragmatic nonviolence, is based on the assumption that nonviolent action is more effective than other means of action for opposing aggression and oppression, in particular more effective than violence. As noted earlier, Gene Sharp, the most prominent exponent of pragmatic nonviolence, divides the methods of nonviolent action into three types (Sharp, 1973). [3] First is nonviolent protest and persuasion: typical methods include petitions, banners, picketing, wearing of symbols, fraternization, singing, pilgrimages, demonstrative funerals, teach-ins and walk-outs. These methods can all be interpreted as means of communication to the opponent. One means by which these methods can work is through conversion, as in principled nonviolence, but there are other possibilities. For example, opponents might perceive the passion or organization of the activists and decide to treat their message more seriously, without being convinced or converted.

Sharp's second category of nonviolent action is noncooperation, which includes social noncooperation such as ostracism, stay-at-home and suspension of sporting events, economic noncooperation covering numerous types of boycotts and strikes, and political noncooperation such as stalling, refusal to accept appointed officials, and withholding of diplomatic recognition. Again, these forms of action have important communicative dimensions, for example revealing concerns, organization, and ability to change behaviour. It is commonplace that a strike can send a strong message to employers, stronger than claims by trade union leaders in negotiations, about the unity, commitment and power of the workers. Communication of course need not involve words: noncooperation on its own creates meanings among observers, though explanations help to crystalize the purposes of the actions or, semiotically speaking, select out denotations from a range of connotations.

The third category of nonviolent action is nonviolent intervention, including for example sit-ins, fasts, overloading of facilities (such as hospitals), seizure of assets, alternative markets and parallel government. The level of coercion in these forms of nonviolent action is greater, but there are still important communicative dimensions. As with methods of noncooperation, methods of intervention send messages about commitment, organization and ability to act. The communicative dimensions of noncooperation and intervention are what anarchists call 'propaganda of the deed', in which the drama of action communicates without words.

We have referred to the conventional distinction between principled and pragmatic nonviolence for convenience; in practice, the separation is far from rigid. As noted, Gandhi espoused a principled position but had a canny sense of what would be effective. On the other hand, many western activists who adopt a pragmatic position in organizing actions personally hold a principled position, though they may not advertise it. Furthermore, pragmatic uses of nonviolent action draw strength from a cultural rejection of violence (in certain circumstances), revealing a link between the principled and pragmatic orientations.

This brief overview reveals that communication is a central element in nonviolent action, though the precise mechanism that communication plays in making nonviolent action effective varies from method to method and case to case.

Modes of Political Communication

In order to gain insight into the distinguishing features of nonviolence as communication, it is helpful to make comparisons with other modes of political communication. Of the many ways of communicating politically, we select three for purposes of comparison: rational discourse, electoral politics and violence. Each of these lies on the other side of one of nonviolence's conceptual boundaries; given that nonviolence is a contested concept, in each case there are disputed areas near the boundary.

The first boundary is between 'discourse' and 'action'. Nonviolent action involves action, namely doing something - from circulating a petition to striking - whereas discourse involves talking or some other means of symbolic communication. (For those who consider talking to be a form of action, the boundary can be said to be between 'discursive action' and 'supra-discursive action.') Many of the methods of symbolic action, such as writing letters, lie close to the action-discourse boundary. Rational discourse, which we have selected as a contrast to nonviolent action, is of course just one type of discourse.

The second boundary is between conventional and nonconventional action. Conventional political action includes speeches, meetings, holding of elections, voting, political party formation, lobbying and much else that is considered normal or routine in countries with representative government. Nonviolent action, in contrast - as defined by its theorists - includes principally or only those forms of action that go beyond normal political behaviour. Boycotts and sit-ins, for example, are not part of the routine operation of the political system: they are not regular, predictable features of political life like elections or meetings of a political party branch; sometimes they are illegal. The category 'conventional political action' depends on the context. In some polities, petitions, rallies or even strikes may become routine and unexceptional, whereas in others even a mild petition is treated by political leaders as a serious challenge. The category 'nonviolent action' is meant to capture the more challenging, nonroutine forms of action.

The third boundary is between violence and nonviolence. Violence here refers to physical violence, such as beatings, imprisonment and killings: for discussing this boundary we set aside such usages as emotional violence and structural violence. Violence against physical objects is at the boundary, with debate over whether sabotage counts as nonviolent action.

Table I shows the array of eight possibilities created by combining all three contrasts: discourse-action, conventional-nonconventional and violence-nonviolence.

Table I. Nonviolent action in conceptual space created by the contrasts discourse-action, conventional-nonconventional and violent-nonviolent. Typical examples are given in each category.

Nonviolent	*Nonconventional*	*Conventional*
Action	Rallies, strikes and other forms of nonviolent action	Elections, lobbying and other routine political actions
Discourse	Strong emotional appeals	Everyday conversation

Violent	*Nonconventional*	*Conventional*
Action	Nonstate terrorism	Police action, warfare
Discourse	Personal verbal abuse	Verbal abuse in sporting competitions

Several of the entries in Table I could be contested, especially those for discourse, with 'violent discourse' a dubious category. Our main point, though, is to illustrate how nonviolent action is situated in relation to other activities. We now focus on the contrast between nonviolent action and three contrasting forms of political communication, namely rational discourse, electoral politics and terrorism.

For many, rational discourse is an ideal mode of political communication (Habermas 1984, 1987), even if in reality it is only approximated occasionally. In rational discourse, participants eschew manipulation, emotionalism, special pleading and anything else that undermines an exchange on the basis of facts and logic. Arguably, this is the best way for members of a political community to reach agreements on sensible ways to live together, though we need not enter into the debates over the feasibility and desirability of rational discourse as a means or a goal in order to consider it, as an ideal type, as a mode of political communication.

Electoral politics is a rather different mode of political communication. For the purposes here we can characterize electoral politics as a competition between parties (and candidates) for political office, in which elections are the primary means of selection. Electoral politics has several communicative dimensions. Most obviously, candidates and political parties seek to win the allegiance of voters through both direct communication, such as advertising and election speeches, and by implementing policies that are perceived as desirable. While some elements of electoral politics proceed on the basis of rational assessment of options, others are more manipulative, such as provision of special funding in crucial electorates ('pork-barrelling') and symbolic crusades against crime or foreigners, not to mention routine attempts to set agendas, put favourable glosses on actions (public relations and spin-doctoring) and in other ways achieve advantage over political opponents.

A third method of political communication is violence. An example is terrorist attacks, a typical purpose of which is to communicate the existence and urgency of a particular group's grievances via the mass media. Indeed, terrorism can be conceived of as communication activated and amplified by violence (Schmid & de Graaf, 1982). Governments can also use violence as a form of communication, such as a massive police presence, arrests and brutality against protesters (whether the protesters are violent or nonviolent). Violence can also serve other functions, such as destruction of life and property or either disrupting or preserving order, but usually there are significant communicative dimensions. Indeed, in most cases certain meanings of violence are well understood, such as in warfare, though needless to say the meanings intended by users of violence are not always the same as those perceived by others. Those occasions when meanings are not clear, such as a 'random shooting,' often are the most disturbing.

Though far more could be said about each of these modes of political communication, this outline is enough for our purpose of comparing them. To make the comparison, we select six features that deal with elements of power and social change. They are listed here, each with an associated question.

- Dialogue: does the mode of communication foster a mutual exchange of information and perspectives?
- Means-ends compatibility: is the mode of communication (the means) compatible with the goal of the communication process (the end)?
- Opportunity for participation: is the mode of communication open to anyone who wants to use it?

- Scope for oppression: does the mode of communication have the capacity to harm or subjugate others?
- Power equalization: does the mode of communication have the capacity to reduce inequalities of power between participants?
- System transformation: does the mode of communication have the capacity to change social structures?

Some preliminary assessments are given in Table II.

Table II. Features of four modes of political communication

	Rational discourse	**Electoral politics**	**Nonviolent action**	**Violence**
Dialogue	A characteristic feature	A partial component	An essential element	Limited or nonexistent
Means-ends compatibility	High	Partial	High	Low
Opportunity for participation	High	Limited	High	Low
Scope for oppression	Low	Medium (tyranny of majority)	Low	High
Capacity for power redistribution	Low	Medium	High	High
Capacity for system transformation	Low	Low	High	High

Some of the entries in this table may be self-explanatory, while others could be the subject of extended debate. We offer here a few comments.

Rational discourse is, above all, a method for use in dialogue (though it can also take the form of a monologue). Often, the goal is rational dialogue itself, in which case means-ends compatibility is built in. Another goal is rational action; this can be interpreted as 'discourse in action,' again satisfying means-ends compatibility. Most people can engage in rational discourse, though some are limited by poor skills. On the other hand, rational discourse has little power in itself, either to oppress, to redistribute power or to transform systems.

Electoral politics, as mentioned earlier, is based only in part on rational discourse, hence only partially satisfies dialogism and means-ends compatibility. Most adults can participate as voters, but only a small minority participates as elected officials. Electoral politics has some scope for oppression, especially of outsider groups such as ethnic minorities and prisoners. However, the electoral process provides opportunities for challenging oppression affecting or opposed by the

majority. There is some scope for power redistribution, such as through progressive taxation or policies supporting women, but the actual experience of electoral politics shows that radical power redistribution is unusual and that redistribution may be in favour of the rich and powerful. Finally, electoral politics is seldom self-transformative; it can be argued that it operates as a brake on further democratization (Ginsberg, 1982).

Nonviolent action is designed to foster dialogue. Symbolic actions are dialogic by their nature, while methods of noncooperation and intervention typically operate to pressure opponents to enter a dialogue or to take an existing dialogue more seriously. Nonviolent means are compatible with the end, a nonviolent society. Participation in many methods of nonviolent action is open to anyone without regard to sex, age or ability. Nonviolent action has a low capacity to oppress, yet its capacity to redistribute power and transform systems is potentially large, as shown for example by its role in the collapse of communist regimes in 1989 (Randle, 1991; Roberts, 1991) or in toppling dictators (Parkman, 1990; Zunes, 1994).

Violence rates low on dialogism: there is no further dialogue if the opponent is killed! Likewise, the goal of violence is almost always something other than a violent world, so means-ends compatibility is low. Participation is typically limited, with young fit men far more likely to participate. Violence has a high potential for oppression. It also has a large capacity to redistribute power and transform systems, as shown by numerous violent revolutions.

These modes of political communication could be compared on other grounds and with greater nuance, but this short assessment is sufficient to show some key similarities and differences between the modes. What distinguishes nonviolent action is its high transformative potential while remaining dialogic and participatory. Another way of looking at this is to note that nonviolent action has the potential for direct dialogue, as in rational discourse, as well as the potential for redressing power imbalances and inequitable systems, which are the structural impediments to dialogue between equals.

Dimensions of Nonviolence as Communication

Most of the attention in the nonviolence literature is on the effect of nonviolent action on opponents. As noted earlier, Gandhi saw the key effect as conversion, whereas Sharp saw a range of effects, from persuasion to coercion. Looking at nonviolence as communication is a convenient way of bringing out other effects of nonviolent action. We proceed by looking at nonviolent action as a means to promote dialogue, asking, in particular, with whom does the dialogue occur?

In relation to opponents, nonviolent action plays a double role in relation to dialogue: it is both a direct attempt at dialogue - most obviously in methods of symbolic action - and preparation for dialogue. In canonical nonviolent action, activists initially seek to resolve problems through dialogue, but when the opponent refuses to discuss matters, operates in bad faith or uses violence, nonviolent action becomes a means to encourage the opponent to enter dialogue (Naess, 1974: 90-93). In such cases, nonviolent action is a means for power equalization, which can be seen as preparation for a dialogue between equals, in which rational discourse is a more reasonable prospect.

Another target audience for nonviolence as communication is third parties. If opponents are not receptive, groups that are not involved may be, and their influence on the opponent can be decisive. Galtung (1989: 13-33) calls this process of indirect influence 'the great chain of nonviolence'. [4] As noted earlier, nonviolent action in the salt satyagraha had its main effect on the British colonial rulers indirectly, via news reports that awakened the concern of citizens in Britain, USA and elsewhere. Galtung conceives of the great chain as a psychological process: when there is too great a psychological distance between activists and opponents, intermediaries can bridge the gap. The

process can also be conceptualized as a communication chain (Martin & Varney, 2003): if direct communication is blocked for whatever reason (physical barriers, language, meaning systems), intermediaries can constitute a communication channel that carries the message. Because the British colonial rulers and their agents had so little respect for the Indian population, direct communications from satyagrahis had little impact. The news reports took Gandhi's message to a more receptive audience in other countries, members of which were able to communicate directly to those running Britain's colonial empire.

Another dimension of nonviolence as communication is communication within the group of nonviolent activists and supporters. On a practical level, communication among activists is necessary to decide on and coordinate actions. This process is closely linked to what is commonly called empowerment, a topic that surprisingly has been neglected within the nonviolence literature (Kraft & Speck, 2000). It is well known to activists that a well-planned and executed nonviolent action can be tremendously empowering. This comes through the experience of participating in action against perceived injustice, which gives rise to satisfying feelings of solidarity and mutual validation, though such desirable outcomes do not occur for all participants or in all actions.

One aspect of the empowerment process is communication, which can be between activists, between activists and opponents, and between activists and third parties. Previously we talked about the effect of communication on opponents, who are the recipients of activists' messages (in the form of nonviolent action); here we are concerned with the effect on activists themselves. Those who participate in and support nonviolent actions are, in essence, communicating with themselves via their actions, revealing to each other their own power to act and to make a difference. The supportive response of other activists provides validation for their actions and beliefs (Colquhoun & Martin, 2001), creating the experience of empowerment. Routine communication among activists prior to and during actions is usually linked to this validation and empowerment.

Another aspect of collective empowerment occurs when nonparticipants who witness nonviolent actions become aware that their views are more widely shared than they realized. When censorship or social pressure restricts the expression of political sympathies, it is possible for action to trigger a rapid expansion in overt support.

Closely related to collective empowerment is the effect of nonviolent action on the individual, which can be called individual empowerment. As well as the validation received from others, many activists gain an inner sense of meaning, well-being and strength through participation in nonviolent action. For casual participants this may be fleeting, but for those who become more engaged or who join in particularly large, dramatic or dangerous actions, the experience can transform one's sense of self. For instance, a sit-in against desegregation in a Woolworths store in Greensboro, North Carolina in 1960 left participants with 'a powerful sense of confidence and self-esteem … as they overcame their innermost fears to make a public stand' (Cook, 1998: 114).

There are various ways to articulate the process of individual empowerment, some drawn from spiritual traditions; one of them is that a person has communicated with their most inner or deep self. In other words, individual empowerment, especially of a transformative kind, can be interpreted as a process of inner communication.

Table III lists the various dimensions of nonviolence as communication that we have just outlined.

Table III. Dimensions of nonviolence as communication

1. Conversion, persuasion, symbolic action: dialogue with opponents

2. Power equalization via noncooperation and intervention: preparation for dialogue with opponents

3. Mobilization of third parties: the chain of nonviolence

4. Collective empowerment: dialogue within activist groups

5. Individual empowerment: inner dialogue

Although we have emphasized the communicative dimensions of nonviolence, there are other conceptual frames for each of these processes, as suggested by some of the words in Table III such as 'power equalization', 'mobilization' and 'empowerment'. Different frameworks for conceptualizing these processes each have their own advantages and disadvantages. The advantage of a communication framework is the highlighting of communication channels (such as via a chain of nonviolence) and of the importance of shared meanings.

The history of thinking about the operation of nonviolent action can be interpreted as a changing of ideas about communication. In the Gandhian model, the actions of satyagrahis, themselves based on rigorous adherence to 'truth', are supposed to penetrate directly into the consciousness of opponents, leading to conversion. But without shared systems of meaning, this did not occur so often. The pragmatic approach to nonviolence eliminated reliance on conversion, instead proposing a range of methods for persuasion and nonviolent coercion. In the pragmatic picture, communication operates to a considerable extent through the demonstration to the opponent of the cohesiveness and power of the activists. While the pragmatic approach includes direct communication through symbolic actions, the issue of shared meanings is not put central stage. This is addressed by Galtung's great chain of nonviolence, reconceptualized as a chain of speech situations, each one of which is closer to ideal (in terms of meanings and power) than the direct activist-opponent channel. All these approaches have focussed primarily on changing the opponent's beliefs and behaviours. It is only recently that much attention has been placed on nonviolent action's role in social empowerment, [5] a process that can be interpreted as dialogue between nonviolent activists. Finally, the issue of individual empowerment takes us full circle back to the Gandhian perspective. However, for Gandhi, individual empowerment, or inner peace, was a *prerequisite* for nonviolent action, and this view is commonly held today by advocates of principled nonviolence. The additional point we note here is that individual empowerment can (also) be a *result* of participation in nonviolent action. This has long been widely recognized by activists but has not received much attention from researchers in the pragmatic approach to nonviolent action. A focus on communication provides one window into the process.

However, a communication perspective on nonviolence also has weaknesses, most obviously in not highlighting the role of power that is correctly emphasized in analyses using the pragmatic approach. The risk in studying nonviolence through a communication lens is to focus so much on discourse that crucial power dimensions are neglected. We think that it can be helpful to look at nonviolence as communication, but this is only one way to gain insight into nonviolence.

To illustrate the various communicative dimensions of nonviolence, we use two examples of nonviolent action in the Soviet Union: resistance to the 1991 coup and strikes at Soviet forced labour camps in 1953. In each case, we briefly outline the events and then analyse them in terms of the five dimensions of nonviolence as communication listed in Table III.

Communication in the 1991 Soviet Coup

On 18 August 1991, a group calling itself the State Committee for the State of Emergency in the USSR detained Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in his Crimean dacha and launched a coup. The next morning, decrees by the Committee were announced over the media, political parties other than the Communist Party banned, opposition media outlets closed, arrests of activists and liberal politicians initiated, and tanks sent to the centre of Moscow. There were eight figures in the Emergency Committee, with Soviet Vice-President Gennadi Yanayev the nominal leader. The coup was an attempt to curb reforms, especially those concerning autonomy for the republics, and to impose greater centralised control as in the years before glasnost and perestroika.

Opponents used a range of nonviolent actions and within three days the coup collapsed for want of popular support and military back-up (Foye, 1992). There is ample evidence that communication played a central role in the struggle (Ganley, 1996: 122-219). The contemporaneous media coverage and commentary on the coup made it a type of 'instant history' (Gerbner, 1993).

Some commentators have said that the coup failed because the coup leaders were bumblers who were ill prepared for their task (Ganley, 1996: 129-135; Kotkin, 2001: 97-103). Others, though, believe the coup was well organised and fairly widely supported (Billington, 1992: 34; Miller, 1992: 72). Pozner (1992: 214) says that the coup leaders 'had everything going for them: the armed forces, the KGB, the Party, the police' and the precedent of the Soviet people's acceptance of authority. From this perspective, popular resistance was crucial to the coup's failure. Sixsmith (1991: 146) concludes that 'the most likely explanation for the plotters' indecision and seeming lack of nerve is that they were never prepared for anything other than a palace coup' as in the 1964 toppling of Nikita Khrushchev. Relatively few citizens took action against the coup, with most continuing with life as usual (Billington, 1992: 32; Loory & Imse, 1991: 108-109; Pozner, 1992: 78; Sixsmith, 1991: 42). Nevertheless, citizens who openly opposed the coup contributed to military and KGB insubordination, which was central to the coup's failure.

1. Conversion, Persuasion, Symbolic action: Dialogue with Opponents

The focal point of the resistance to the coup was a continuous rally outside the Russian parliament building in Moscow beginning Monday 19 August. There were also demonstrations elsewhere and a range of other actions. Symbols of resistance, present in most actions, were particularly vivid in anti-coup graffiti and slogans.

Boris Yeltsin, president of the Russian republic, soon came to fill a de facto leadership role in the resistance. Yeltsin did not engage in direct dialogue with the coup leaders, but attendance at anti-coup demonstrations - despite bans and curfews - the setting up of alternative newspapers, mass leafleting and strikes carried the message of refusal to acknowledge the coup's legitimacy, without a word needing to be spoken directly to the coup perpetrators.

In keeping with their attempt to make the coup appear legitimate, Yanayev and his co-conspirators held a media conference at which journalists were able to ask questions (Black, 1993: 189-198; Ganley, 1996: 129-130; Sixsmith, 1991: 22-26). The critical content and tone of journalists' questions can be interpreted as a form of persuasion. At the conference, Yanayev's hands perceptibly trembled; jokes about this quickly spread around the country, helping undermine the credibility of the coup.

An important method of persuasion is fraternization, which involves using personal influence to put pressure on soldiers. It can include processes such as outlining and discussing dilemmas, solidifying doubts, enumerating options, and giving positive voice to the worth of taking action. Resistance movements have often tried to win the support of soldiers, unsuccessfully in the case of mass demonstrations in Burma in the 1980s (Aung San Suu Kyi, 1997) and China in 1989 (Simmie &

Nixon, 1989), and successfully in the cases of the defeat of the Kapp Putsch in Germany in 1920 (Goodspeed, 1962) and 'people power' in the Philippines in 1986 (Thompson, 1995), to give just some examples.

In the case of the Soviet coup, resisters at mass rallies stood shoulder to shoulder with soldiers, pleading, persuading, cajoling, demanding that they support their struggle and not the coup. As bonds formed and tensions lessened, symbolism was evident, from the niceties of sharing sweets, jokes and cups of tea to the more pronounced signs of flowers decking the tanks (Freidin, 1994: 74).

Randle (1994: 110-115) claims that less polarized conditions are more conducive to conversion. Protesters at most anti-coup demonstrations worked hard to keep the lines of communication open, sometimes with jokes, sometimes with forceful argument, but always in a way that allowed empathy to build. When asked if he would shoot if ordered to do so, one soldier expressed such empathy in his reply: 'You know, I'm Russian, just like all of them. I think I'd rather go to jail than shoot at my own people' (Attard, 1997: 182-183).

General Konstantin Kobets, assigned by Yeltsin to defend parliament, organized a more systematic process of fraternization (Billington, 1992: 39-40; Sixsmith, 1991: 40-41), enlisting Russian parliamentarians to team up with uniformed soldiers and approach army units, encouraging them to defect. Kobets and others phoned fellow officers to gain their support (Billington, 1992: 39; Loory and Imse, 1991: 108). Some Supreme Soviet Deputies visited military bases and installations to tell armed forces personnel about Yeltsin's speech and to urge them to support the resistance. The All-Union Soviet of the Parents of Military Personnel also called on the armed forces to oppose the coup.

The fraternization efforts, plus the symbolic effect of popular opposition, inhibited violence. The elite Alpha Group of the KGB, assigned the task of capturing the Russian parliament building, did not go through with its plan (Billington, 1992: 41; Loory & Imse, 1991: 124-125, 138-139), since it anticipated killing several thousand defenders. According to Pozner (1992: 175), 'These men did not want to take responsibility for spilling the blood of their brothers and sisters. As one of them told me, "My son could have been with the defenders; so could have my brother, or lover, or wife. I was not going to risk killing them".' There was no direct fraternization with members of the Alpha Group; it was the symbolic power of open protest that served as a form of persuasion.

There were many other attempts at persuasion. A makeshift radio studio was set up in the Russian parliament building; broadcasts were taped and sent to factories and schools in Moscow (Billington, 1992: 102; Sixsmith, 1991: 19). Protesters put up posters and stood on street corners and in subways circulating leaflets and underground newspapers. Even non-media institutions became involved in mass circulation. Workers at the Kirov tractor factory in Leningrad used fax machines at the plant to transmit speeches of defiance and support and to call for a campaign of civil disobedience. The Mayor of Ryazan ran off twenty thousand copies of Yeltsin's decrees. Ham radios were brought out of mothballs and re-employed to receive and transmit details of resistance (Loory & Imse, 1991: 106). Leningrad taxi drivers were even more directly involved, using their taxis and taxi radios to organize themselves into a fleet to watch for and report on tanks and other signs of possible attack. In Moscow, couriers on bikes performed a similar role, as well as transmitting messages between resisters. A hot line was set up and people invited to report troop movements and to give information on picking up frequencies to stay one step ahead of the jamming undertaken by the putschists (Gambrell, 1991; Rebezov & Guskov, 1991). Around the tunnels of Moscow's Metro, the little card tables normally laden with wares were 'replaced by crowds around broadsides issued not from the presses of *Pravda* but from desktop publishers using their computers and laser printers to put together bits of news scavenged from rumor and electronic gateways to the West' (Valauskas, 1992). Computer networks remained unsevered and were well utilized to spread information widely and quickly (Ganley, 1996: 186-189; Travica & Hogan, 1992).

2. Power Equalization via Noncooperation and Intervention: Preparation for Dialogue with Opponents

As tanks rolled towards the centre of Moscow, civilians stood in the way: the tank drivers then took other routes (Sixsmith, 1991: 13-14). Noncooperation was also evident in defiance of curfews, refusal to obey orders and the compromising and re-interpreting of orders. Strikes, for example in the coal-mining regions of Siberia and the important military-industrial complex of Gorky, were another form of noncooperation (Attard, 1997: 184).

Alternative institutions, a form of nonviolent intervention, were most notable at the Russian parliament building, which quickly became an alternative centre of control, and the media (Ganley, 1996: 153-183). The coup leaders shut down all but nine publications. Most of these nine supported the plotters, but journalists and printers at *Izvestiya* demanded that Yeltsin's viewpoint be printed, leading the editor to allow Yeltsin's opposition and call for a general strike to be printed (Izyumov, 1992: 27; Sixsmith, 1991: 18-19). Journalists from suspended newspapers produced makeshift newspapers and leaflets. On 19 August, workers from the independent newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, defying the ban on their paper, prepared a four-page proof, only to find that the state printing office would not print it. Undeterred, they faxed the proofs to France, where the text was translated and published. That night *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* workers put together a bulletin called *A Chronicle of Events of August 19-20*, a play on the name of a well-known *samizdat* publication, and posted a thousand copies of it, along with other newsletters and leaflets, in visible places around Moscow (Ganley, 1996: 155-156). Stronger transmitters were brought to Moscow and slipped into the Russian parliament building so that broadcasts could be extended in power, received by local stations across the country and rebroadcast (Ganley, 1996: 141). These are examples of noncooperation and intervention as direct preparation for communication.

3. Mobilization of Third Parties: The Chain of Nonviolence

In the case of Gandhi's salt march, reports of police assaults on marchers put in motion the dynamics of political jiu-jitsu: nonviolent resisters were perceived to occupy the moral high ground and observers (either in person or through the media) were won over to their cause (Sharp, 1973; Martin, Varney & Vickers, 2001). These third parties in turn put pressure on British colonial rulers, completing a chain of nonviolence between the activists and their ultimate opponents. Had Soviet soldiers brutally assaulted or opened fire on resisters to the coup, a similar process might have occurred. But due to the soldiers' restraint and the short duration of the coup, mobilization of third parties played a relatively small role in the coup. Initially, US president George Bush gave only tepid criticism of the coup, suggesting that it might be possible to work with the new leader Yanayev. Pozner's (1992: 80) dismayed response was to ask, 'But was that really the best he could do?' But as opposition to the coup became apparent, US government rhetoric against it became stronger (Crowley, 1991; Ganley, 1996: 145-146; Sixsmith, 1991: 177).

Although the US government's overt stance did little to undermine the coup, there was a powerful indirect influence. According to Sixsmith (1991: 145), the coup leaders realized that they could only gain international support - needed to obtain economic assistance - if they gained power quickly and bloodlessly. This is a key reason why Yanayev and his fellow conspirators tried to justify the coup constitutionally and why they minimised their use of force. Hence the death of three Moscow protesters in a complex confrontation on 20 August (Loory & Imse, 1991: 134-146; Sixsmith, 1991: 41-43) - even though other protesters in the clash were aggressive - was a serious blow to the coup. It might be said, then, that the coup leaders' path was shaped by the existence of a *potential* chain of nonviolence. This in turn meant that a relatively limited degree of resistance was enough to bring down the coup.

At an individual level, some opponents of the coup obtained immediate international support via e-mail (Ganley, 1996: 186-189). The connections between communication and morale are evident in some e-mail messages to people in other countries: 'Anyway, our main communication line is still open and it makes us more optimistic'; 'You can't even imagine how grateful we are for your help and support in this terrible time! The best thing is to know that we aren't alone' (Press, 1991: 23). These are not examples of a completed chain of nonviolence but do show how communication to third parties can contribute to empowerment.

4. Collective Empowerment: Dialogue within Activist Groups

There was communication among resisters to the coup through various media: face-to-face at rallies, by radio among taxi drivers, and by e-mail. Several observers suggest that collective empowerment occurred especially when groups witnessed symbolic resistance or when successes occurred. A key symbolic event for the resistance was Yeltsin's mounting of a tank outside the Russian parliament and giving a speech encouraging defiance of the coup (Ganley, 1996: 147-148; Sixsmith, 1991: 15). Pozner (1992: 89-90) says that 'it was the best kind of grandstand move possible, because it brought hope. … It spoke to our pride and to those things that had been taken away - to our sense of self-respect, to our identity'. Sixsmith (1991: 29) reports that sharing food and drink at the barricades was 'a simple act of communion, of giving and taking, which made us all feel part of a common cause'. When a dozen tanks defected to the resistance, 'An overwhelming feeling of relief, that we were not alone against the world after all, swept through the crowd' (Sixsmith 1991: 30; see also Billington 1992: 40). Billington (1992: 41) reports a carnival atmosphere at the rally, at which speeches inspired cheers and tears (1992: 57). According to Sixsmith (1991: 30), 'The public address system turned out to be a vital tool: it kept the spirit of communal responsibility going, and it helped defuse the circulation of rumours and scare stories', though it was also used for morale-boosting but false information.

Leaders play an important role in collective empowerment, often playing a central role in communication within the movement. In the form of nonviolence espoused by Gandhi, leaders achieve high levels of spiritual purity and make significant sacrifices before taking on leadership roles. Yeltsin was not such a leader (Reddaway & Glinski, 2001). Rather he appears to have been motivated by his own political ambitions and, though he was inspirational in the resistance to the coup, it seems that he was capable of manipulating moods and opportunities. Yeltsin embraced the nonviolent approach because, opposed by a huge military force, there was no other viable option. Though he gave rhetoric to democracy, Yeltsin's approach did not appear to embrace the participatory advantages of nonviolent action.

5. Individual Empowerment: Inner Dialogue

Though it is reasonable to infer that some level of individual empowerment occurs in any successful nonviolent action - such as fraternizing with soldiers or organizing a strike - the direct evidence for this during the resistance to the Soviet coup is limited. Vladimir Pozner, a well-known Soviet television broadcaster, gives a personal account that is relevant here. He was asked by many foreign media to give interviews, but he hesitated due to worries about what might happen to him (Pozner, 1992: 91-92). Despising himself for his reservations, he eventually agreed to interviews. Immediately after this decision, he felt personally empowered: 'I was feeling a joy as great as I had ever experienced. In this time of darkness, my spirits were soaring, my soul was singing. The fear was gone, conquered now I knew forever." (Pozner, 1992: 99).

Communication in Soviet Labour Camps, 1953

Prison camps were set up by the Bolsheviks soon after the October 1917 revolution. [6] The scale of imprisonment expanded enormously beginning in the late 1920s, with most prisoners forced to labour, especially in mining, logging and building. From the 1930s through the mid 1950s there were millions of prisoners in numerous camps around the country, with large numbers dying due to overwork, extreme climate, disease and malnutrition. The camps included common criminals - some convicted of serious crimes, others of no more than stealing food during famine conditions - and political prisoners. After World War II, large numbers of soldiers who had been captured by the Nazis, plus opponents of Soviet rule such as members of Ukrainian nationalist organizations, were sent to labour camps. Due to the arduous conditions and brutality, effective resistance was extremely difficult to organize. In the 1930s there were hunger strikes, though with little successful outcome. In the late 1940s there was a major armed revolt involving tens of thousands of prisoners, nearly all of whom were killed (Ivanova, 2000: 106).

In March 1953, Stalin died, leading to high expectations among prisoners of relief from their ordeal. However, the government's initial amnesty, at the end of the month, applied mainly to nonpolitical prisoners. In this tense situation, abuses by camp personnel were the trigger for a series of strikes (Craveri, 1997: 367-368; Ivanova, 2000: 176). Some months later, the arrest of Beria, head of the MVD that ran the camps, bolstered prisoners' willingness to defy the authorities.

We focus here on the 1953 strikes at Norilsk and Vorkuta; there was also a major uprising at Kengir in 1954 (Solzhenitsyn, 1978: 285-331). The authorities used force, including massacres, to end the strikes, but a number of the strikers' demands were met subsequently (Craveri, 1997: 377). Unlike the fate of earlier resisters, strike leaders at Norilsk and Vorkuta were not executed but instead put on trial; many of them were acquitted.

1. Conversion, Persuasion, Symbolic action: Dialogue with Opponents

At some of the Norilsk and Vorkuta camps, strikers prepared sets of demands, such as for releasing certain categories of prisoners, the right to write letters once a month, and removal of numbers from their uniforms (Buca, 1976: 255-257). One reason for the moderate nature of most of their demands was to help win over their opponents. A commission from Moscow was sent to hear the strikers' grievances but, because it was composed only of generals and MVD officials, it was received only in some camps.

The strikers also made efforts to persuade camp guards of the worthiness of their case. Given that machine guns were trained on them, it was important to avoid providing any excuse for an attack on the prisoners. Buca (1976: 236), the leader of the resistance at camp 29, told his collaborators to speak politely to guards even when they were rude, to keep calm and avoid incidents. In some of Buca's speeches to prisoners, he intended guards to overhear what he said so that they would be aware of the prisoners' good intentions. At Buca's camp, the prisoners cooperated with authorities - for example in relation to mine safety and bread-making - to keep the camp going and win allies.

2. Power Equalization via Noncooperation and Intervention: Preparation for Dialogue with Opponents

Striking, a form of noncooperation, was the principal means of nonviolent action used by the prisoners. It had a potent effect. The strikes were a direct challenge to the MVD's control. In addition, there was an economic effect since the camps were an integrated part of the Soviet

economy, even though, despite its low labour costs, the Gulag was less productive on average than the rest of the Soviet economy (Ivanova, 2000: 189). Other means of nonviolent action were refusing to obey orders and setting up camp committees run by prisoners.

The strikes seemed to work well as a means of promoting dialogue. Rather than immediately exert force to break the strikes, the camp authorities temporarily adapted to the new situation, for example by providing the usual food rations. Their responses were influenced by political uncertainty in the aftermath of Stalin's death. Visits to the camps by a commission from Moscow represented the success of the strikes in inducing the authorities to engage in dialogue. The interactions that eventuated were far from an engagement between equals, but this cannot be expected when using nonviolent action to prepare for dialogue.

3. Mobilization of Third Parties: The Chain of Nonviolence

The strikers made attempts to win over third parties. At Norilsk, strikers prepared banners to be hung on their barracks, with messages aimed at local free inhabitants. They also attached their messages to kites and designed them to drop them over the city of Norilsk. The importance of communicating to the outside world is suggested by attempts by guards, using their own kites, to prevent the kite-dissemination of messages (Graziosi, 1992: 433-434). The authorities also used propaganda to nearby communities to counter communication from prisoners.

Mobilization of third parties could also occur through other chains, for example sympathetic guards talking to local people, relatives or superiors. There is little evidence of the scale or impact of such chains. This suggests that mobilization of third parties was limited, with most of the action involving prisoners, the MVD and high levels of the Communist Party.

4. Collective Empowerment: Dialogue within Activist Groups

Within the camps, there were immense obstacles to achieving any sort of solidarity among prisoners, who were divided by nationality and politics and physically weakened by the punishing work and meagre rations. The camp authorities used various means to divide the prisoners from each other, including spreading rumours, rewarding criminal prisoners who collaborated with the authorities and transporting actual or potential challengers to other camps or putting them in isolation cells.

Communication among the prisoners was thus absolutely essential to building the solidarity necessary to launch and maintain the strikes. Buca (1976: 237) reports that he had agents in all 41 huts at Vorkuta camp 29 to report on possible problems such as quarrels between different nationalities. The MVD approached some prisoners who left that camp to attend to mine safety with the aim of gaining their assistance to assassinate Buca, but the prisoners informed him and he was able to take precautions. Internal solidarity and communication thus helped forestall plans by the authorities to undermine the strike by taking out the leader. Scholmer (1954) reports that the MVD let empty trucks run between the pit head and the slag heap to give the appearance, to neighbouring camps, that the pit was still working, thus aiming to reduce the prisoners' sense of solidarity.

For communication between camps, Buca (1976: 230) reports that prisoners scratched messages on the sides of rail wagons and, less specifically, communicated 'by pre-arranged channels through the co-operation of free workers' (Buca, 1976: 252). Another method was to write messages on tree trunks that were brought in from other areas (Graziosi, 1992: 426). The MVD policy of continually transferring prisoners to other camps, as a means of inhibiting the development of resistance organizations, also had the effect of allowing news from one camp to get to others, including

information about resistance (Graziosi, 1992: 426).

5. Individual Empowerment: Inner Dialogue

Although there is little direct evidence of inner dialogue, it is plausible to infer some degree of individual empowerment from the actions taken by the strikers. Buca (1976: 259) says that as the camp authorities openly prepared to attack, most prisoners preferred to die rather than return to work. (As it happened, dozens died and many more were injured in the massacre at camp 29.) From his account, Buca seems to have been highly motivated in his role as leader of the strike at that camp, for example spending several days with little sleep, being concerned every hour about the complex organizational and tactical challenges of maintaining the strike.

Conclusion

Looking at nonviolent action through a communication lens provides insight into its special characteristics and different dimensions. Nonviolent action can be conceptualized as a form of political communication that is distinctive - compared, for example, with rational discourse, electoral politics, and violence - in its commitment to dialogue combined with the capacity for system transformation.

We have proposed that nonviolence as communication can usefully be divided into five dimensions: conversion, power equalization, mobilization of third parties, collective empowerment and individual empowerment. The first dimension, including processes of conversion, persuasion and symbolic action, contains the most obvious ways in which nonviolence is a form of communication.

The second dimension, power equalization via noncooperation and nonviolent intervention, can be considered to comprise ways of preparing for dialogue. (This is separate from the more directly symbolic aspects of noncooperation and intervention.) On the other hand, noncooperation and intervention serve as means of nonviolent coercion that supplement or replace dialogue with the exercise of power. This is one important way in which nonviolence is more than just communication.

The third dimension of nonviolence as communication is mobilization of third parties, often through what Galtung (1989) calls the great chain of nonviolence, which can be thought of as a communication chain. The chain gets around power inequalities by utilizing a series of links, each of which is closer to power equality than the direct connection between resisters and their opponents.

The fourth and fifth dimensions, collective and individual empowerment, are often neglected in studies of nonviolent action that focus on influencing opponents. Yet in many nonviolent actions, such as the familiar petition or rally, the major impact is not on outsiders but on participants. Communication in these cases is primarily inward rather than outward. These dimensions of nonviolence deserve far more attention.

Our case studies from the Soviet Union, namely resistance to the 1991 coup and the 1953 strikes at Norilsk and Vorkuta, illustrate the dimensions of nonviolence as communication but also reveal the limitations of the five-dimension framework. Many actions mix two or more dimensions, such as strikes that prepared the way for dialogue and resulted in collective and individual empowerment.

Attention to the communicative dimensions of nonviolence can serve as a warning to activists that nonviolent actions do not 'speak for themselves'. Communication is a process of creating meanings, so struggles over this process are central to the impact of nonviolent action. For example,

governments can try to dismiss, discredit and undermine activists by confiscating records, censorship, putting pressure on the media, public relations, spreading rumours and producing disinformation. Therefore, activists should not allow communication issues to become secondary to what they call 'action', but should address struggles over meaning as central to their efforts. This was true enough in Gandhi's time, but becomes ever more important in a world saturated with constructed images.

Notes

[1] In our examination of the nonviolence and communication literatures, we have discovered a couple of significant contributions - Bode (1994) and Ramana Murti (1968) - with nothing emanating from communication scholars. It is possible, though, that additional work exists of which we are unaware.

[2] We use the terminology of creating or sharing meanings rather than the more technical terms familiar to semioticians.

[3] Other accounts of nonviolence in the pragmatic tradition include Ackerman & DuVall (2000), Ackerman & Kruegler (1994), Cooney & Michalowski (1987), Crow et al. (1990) and McManus & Schlabach (1991).

[4] Galtung (1989: 24) appears to apply the adjective 'great' to his chain-of-nonviolence hypothesis by analogy to the Great Chain of Being. See, for example, Lovejoy (1950).

[5] War Resisters' International sponsored an e-discussion on nonviolence and social empowerment and held a conference in India in February 2001. See http://www.wri-irg.org/nvse/nvsehome.htm. [Note added after publication: Sharp (1973: 777-799), in his comprehensive analysis of nonviolent action, discussed empowerment at some length.]

[6] For general information about Soviet labour camps and the strikes, we draw on Craveri (1997), Ivanova (2000) and Solzhenitsyn (1974, 1975, 1978). Memoirs of strike participants (Buca, 1976; Scholmer 1954) give an inside perspective on communication in the camps, though the representativeness of these accounts is open to question. Graziosi (1992) is an historian's assessment based largely on memoir sources. We thank a referee who is an expert on Soviet labour camps for valuable assistance on facts and sources.

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BRIAN MARTIN, b. 1947, PhD in Physics (University of Sydney, 1976); Associate Professor, University of Wollongong (1986-). Most recent books: *Technology for Nonviolent Struggle* (War Resisters' International, 2001); *Nonviolence versus Capitalism* (War Resisters' International, 2001); *Nonviolence Speaks: Communicating against Repression* (Hampton, 2003; co-author, Wendy Varney).

WENDY VARNEY, b. 1952, PhD in Science and Technology Studies (University of Wollongong, 1995); Honorary Fellow, University of Wollongong (1999-). Most recent book: *Nonviolence Speaks: Communicating against Repression* (Hampton, 2003; co-author, Brian Martin).