

Building a Better World

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Forty-three years ago, I belonged to The Hawaii Resistance. It was an anti-draft group, believing in non-violent revolution. Then I saw a whole row of benches slammed into the ribcage of one of my friends, with whom I was blocking the path for the 29th Brigade of the Hawaii National Guard to get on the airplane for Vietnam. I was horrified to see that happen, to hear him cry out in pain. I got to thinking, suppose hundreds of thousands of us sat down on Pennsylvania Avenue and Wall Street, attempting to bring an end to "business as usual"? Wouldn't the cops just keep raising and lowering their truncheons till we were a bloody mass of broken skulls? Wouldn't the Army also be apt to use their bayonets and guns on us? I thought about it. I agonized over it, because I am not a violent person. I don't want to see anyone hurt, least of all do that hurting myself. Yet I did not at all want to see my sisters and brothers in the Movement, people whom I had grown to love, getting their heads smashed or their guts stabbed or shot.

I spent a few sleepless nights at the beautiful (because of the stars above it and the palm fronds surrounding it) Andrews Amphitheater on the University of Hawaii's Manoa Campus. I kept turning the question of violence vs. non-violence over and over in my mind. Then, because I did not want to see some of the best people I'd ever met slaughtered or otherwise brutalized, I left The Hawaii Resistance and joined SDS. I studied Marxism-Leninism. I began to advocate for a workers' revolution, once I had learned more about it. I wrote many an article and penned many a leaflet with that goal in mind.

Flash forward many years to the Fall of Communism. I was cast into a deep depression to see the future become the recent past. What happened to all our hopes and dreams, that they could disappear, just like that? I commenced to do a great deal of reading, thinking, writing, and listening to music that helped clarify my thinking.

I came to the conclusion that, as demonstrated by actual practice—concrete things which happened in the real world, not in some textbook—the Leninist vanguard party was at the very least partly to blame. Its mechanism, democratic centralism, had in practice way too much centralism and way too little democracy. I also concluded that an armed struggle for power—a violent revolution—brought out the worst in people, because, after all, they're people, who had seen their loved ones and their closest comrades blown away in fierce fighting. So a dictatorship of the proletariat gets established, which is really a dictatorship of the Party elite. Way too much power gets concentrated in way too few hands, leading inevitably to obscene levels of corruption and gross abuses of power, real crimes.

I thought the world had seen quite enough of that sort of thing. What was the answer? I didn't know, but I thought it might dwell in coalitions of alternative parties getting themselves elected into power, having organized in the armed forces well enough, and for long enough, so that any attempted military coup would be foiled by the rank-and-file of the armed forces. If they really "turned those guns around," they might not have to use them.

Was this just as much a delusion as the end justifying the means and violence thus being used to bring about its opposite? If the means justify the end, and we then "live the future now," can we avoid all the hatred and carnage? Maybe so, maybe not.

Every time, which is lately nearly every day, that I read about the slaughter of innocents, whether in Peshawar or Newtown, Aurora or Gaza, I become more convinced that it's worth giving non-

violence and the ballot box a try, rather than piling dead bodies upon stacks of more dead bodies.

We have to help more of our brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, comrades, workmates, and neighbors come to the realization that life is precious. Death means you're never going to see that person again or hear them laugh. Raising our voices a little is so much better than raising our fists or reaching for anything deadly.

We can revitalize the trade union movement. We can build alternative parties. We can organize in the armed forces. We can educate, train and provide jobs for our youths, so they don't feel the only way to "make it" is to join gangs, sell drugs and defend turf. We can provide far better mental health counseling and medications. We can do all these things in a gentle, loving way that appeals to people's best instincts, not their worst. Let's stop more Newtowns, Auroras, Peshawars or Gazas before they happen again. Let's build a better world, one brick of kindness and decency at a time.

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