Brian Martin, *Nonviolence versus Capitalism*
(London: War Resisters' International, 2001)

6
Nonviolence strategy

A strategy is essentially a plan of action for getting from a current situation to a desired future situation. So a nonviolence strategy against capitalism is a plan of *nonviolent* action for transforming capitalism into a *nonviolent* alternative. Note that strategy is something in the realm of ideas. Its implementation involves action.

To think about strategy, it can be helpful to distinguish between the realm of actions and the realm of ideas, though in practice they are interlinked. Consider first the realm of actions. Figure 6.1 shows capitalism—itself composed of actions such as producing, selling and consuming—becoming something else: an actual nonviolent alternative. The means for this transformation is nonviolent action.

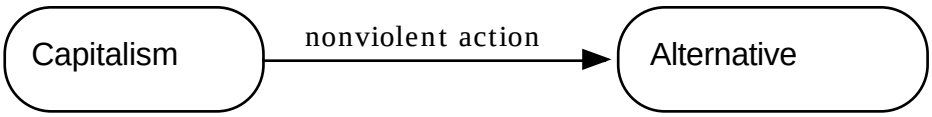

Figure 6.1. Capitalism being transformed into an alternative system through nonviolent action

Figure 6.2 shows how the realm of ideas applies to this picture. Analysis is a way of conceiving or thinking about capitalism, while a goal is an imagined and desired alternative. Strategy is the way of planning a way to get between the current reality and the goal. To develop a strategy, it is necessary to have some analysis of reality as well as some goal. To implement the strategy, methods are needed.

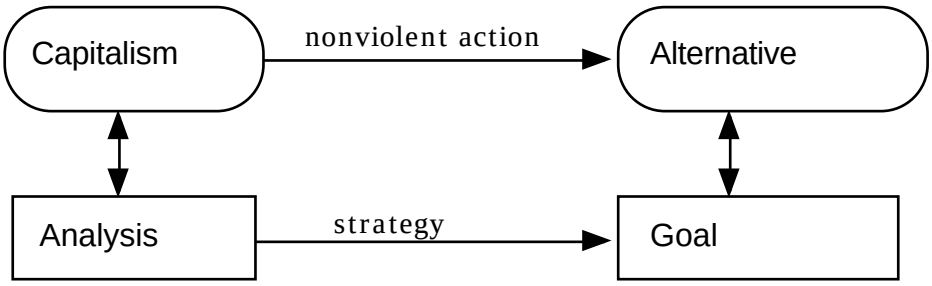

Figure 6.2. Strategy against capitalism. The top level portrays capitalism being transformed into an alternative system through nonviolent action. The lower level portrays thinking about this transformation.

To develop a nonviolence strategy against capitalism, it makes sense that all components of this process are consistent with a nonviolence framework. The analysis of capitalism should be one developed from a nonviolence perspective. That was the task in chapter 3. The goal—an alternative to capitalism—should be a nonviolent alternative. Some possibilities were discussed in chapter 5. Finally, of course the methods should be nonviolent. These were covered in chapter 2.

Figure 6.2 shows a static picture, but actually all components are subject to change. The analysis can change due to new information or new perspectives. Also, the analysis depends to some extent on the goal: because the goal is a nonviolent alternative, the analysis should be from a nonviolence point of view. Similarly, the goals depend in part on the analysis. By examining what works and what goes wrong, such as the conventional anticapitalist strategies covered in chapter 4, goals can be revised or rejected.

Most importantly, the strategy needs to be constantly reexamined and revised as the analysis and goals change and as more people become involved and contribute.

A strategy is much more than a collection of methods. It involves organised goal-directed activities, typically having roles for groups, campaigns and visions, tied together to some extent. Examples are the Third World Network, the campaign against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment, and a vision of support for poor peoples (rather than exploitation).

How can strategies be assessed? One way is to use the principles for assessing nonviolent alternatives to capitalism, applying them in this

case to strategy. Here are the principles as stated in the previous chapter, adapted to deal with strategy. These principles can be applied to both the formulation and implementation aspects of strategy, namely both the thinking and doing aspects.

Principle 1: Cooperation, rather than competition, should be the foundation for the strategy.

Principle 2: People with the greatest needs should have priority in the strategy.

Principle 3: A satisfying role in developing and using strategy should be available to everyone who wants it.

Principle 4: The strategy should be designed and run by the people themselves, rather than authorities or experts.

Principle 5: The strategy should be based on nonviolence.

Principle 5 is the easiest to deal with. Because the strategy relies entirely on nonviolent methods, then the strategy is based on nonviolence, at least in the narrow sense of absence of physical violence. The other principles bring in other dimensions of nonviolence in the wider sense.

Principle 4 is very important. There can be no presumption of formulating a grand plan for bringing about an alternative, since that would be incompatible with the full participation of those involved. The actual strategy has to be worked out by participants, and that is yet to occur. Therefore, any discussion of strategy by an individual, such as in this book, can at most be a small contribution to a much wider process.

Indeed, any overarching plan is vulnerable to attack or cooption, precisely because it is something that can be observed and targeted. Far more threatening to capitalism is a wide variety of challenges and alternative practices, each contributing to a general change of belief and behaviour.

Nevertheless, it is not wise to leave everything to spontaneous and uncoordinated initiative. Thinking strategically is essential so that actions are effective. The goal should be that strategy is democratised. All sorts of individuals and groups need to think about and debate visions, methods and paths, so that the “big picture” is not left to a few high-level theorists or key activists.

Principle 3—providing satisfying roles in developing and using strategy—can be interpreted as an extension of principle 4. Not only is strategy democratised, but satisfying participation is available to all. That means that the prestige roles and tasks should not be monopolised by a few intellectual elites, experienced activists or pioneer organisers. On the other hand, it is essential to recognise that skills and experience are crucial in every aspect of social change, including nonviolent obstruction, engaging in dialogue with strangers, organising meetings, writing media releases and analysing capitalism. To achieve principle 3 requires a process for involving interested people in thinking and doing, developing their skills and experience while not succumbing to the illusion that every committed person can do everything equally well.

Principle 2 is a useful reminder to keep the focus on those most in need. There have been many revolutions made in the name of "the people" that only ended up replacing one elite group by another.

Finally, principle 1 is that the strategy should be developed and implemented cooperatively. That seems obvious enough but the reality is that social movements and action groups can become involved in competitions of various sorts, including for recognition, priority or purity. One of the longest standing conflicts is between those who think class struggle must take priority over all other struggles, and those who think it should be treated as one struggle among many. Whether or not a nonviolence strategy against capitalism can be truly cooperative, it is a worthwhile goal. However, this should be subordinate to other principles such as being nonviolent.

For capitalism to be replaced or transformed into a better social system will take decades or centuries. To imagine that a brief revolutionary struggle can bring about lasting change can be a dangerous delusion. It is far better to think of strategies that bring short-term improvements while contributing to long-term change. If things proceed more quickly than expected, so much the better. But it is quite possible that capitalism will become more powerful and pervasive in spite of all efforts to the contrary. A strategy needs to be viable in that circumstance too.

A check list for campaigns

The five principles are quite general. Furthermore, they were formulated for assessing nonviolent alternatives to capitalism and so may

not be ideal for assessing strategy. On a day-to-day basis, activists are involved in campaigning. For practical purposes, a check list for assessing campaigns can be helpful. Here is one possible check list.

Check list for nonviolent campaigns against capitalism

1. Does the campaign help to
   - undermine the violent underpinnings of capitalism, or
   - undermine the legitimacy of capitalism, or
   - build a nonviolent alternative to capitalism?
2. Is the campaign participatory?
3. Are the campaign's goals built in to its methods?
4. Is the campaign resistant to cooption?

The first point grows out of the analysis of capitalism from a nonviolence perspective in chapter 3, which pinpointed three key ways in which capitalism is maintained: by ultimate resort to violence, through supportive belief systems and by crushing or coopting alternatives. An effective nonviolent campaign could be expected to address one (or possibly more) of these three key areas.

Point 2, that a campaign is participatory, can be seen as an outgrowth of the principle of nonviolence, given that any nonparticipatory approach is open to challenge by nonviolent action.

Point 3 about the compatibility of methods and goals also can be interpreted as an aspect of the principle of nonviolence, in that both the methods and goals are nonviolent. Point 3 also applies to participation, which is part of the goals and methods.

Point 4 grows out of the analysis of capitalism and especially of the failures of conventional anticapitalist strategies. Leninist strategies are now largely discredited. The dominant mainstream strategies, which involve working through the system to promote reform or gradual transformation, are highly susceptible to cooption: they become taken over by the system itself, so that there is little or no change in the structure of capitalism. Therefore, it is wise to pay special attention to a campaign's ability to resist cooption.

Others may wish to revise the points on the check list or add their own. There may be points that are specific to a particular country, issue or action group. The aim here is not to provide a definitive list, but rather to illustrate how such a list can be used.

It is important to remember that check lists and sets of principles are simply tools to use to try to improve effectiveness. They should not be treated as rigid prescriptions or as means to end debate. Quite the contrary: they should be used to encourage discussion. If they are a good choice, they will encourage discussion of things that make a difference.

In the following chapters, campaigns and methods of various types are analysed. Chapter 7 looks at workers' struggles, focussing on campaigns for better wages and conditions, jobs, workers' control, green bans and whistleblowing. Chapter 8 looks at sabotage, which is a method of struggle often perceived as operating at the border between nonviolence and violence. Chapter 9 deals with environmental campaigning, focussing on the issues of pesticides, nuclear power and local antidevelopment campaigning. Chapter 10 deals with social defence, namely nonviolent community resistance to aggression as an alternative to military defence. Although social defence is not normally seen as having economic implications, it is relevant since it challenges the system of violence that supports capitalism. Chapter 11 covers examples relating to global trade, specifically the Multilateral Agreement on Investment and genetically modified organisms. Finally, chapter 12 examines three economic alternatives—community exchange schemes, local money systems and voluntary simplicity—assessing them as strategies. In each case, the check list is used as a foundation for discussing the potential of campaigns to challenge capitalism using nonviolent action.

The campaigns examined in chapters 7 to 12 are some of the important avenues for a nonviolent challenge to capitalism, but there are certainly others, including some feminist and anti-racist campaigns, squatting[1] and culture jamming.[2]

What knowledge is needed in order to assess campaigns? Obviously it helps to have both intimate experience of campaigning plus a full knowledge of history, arguments and outcomes. But to demand such a comprehensive understanding would mean that only a few experts and experienced campaigners could make assessments. Actually, the questions on the check list do not require such a comprehensive understanding. Often the answers come immediately from an awareness of general features of the issue and methods.

Let's look at the questions on the check list to see what it's helpful to know for answering them.

1. Does the campaign help to
   - undermine the violent underpinnings of capitalism, or
   - undermine the legitimacy of capitalism, or
   - build a nonviolent alternative to capitalism?

For answering this question, it is necessary to understand how capitalism is sustained by violence, as described in chapter 3; what is involved in people accepting or rejecting capitalism; and what a nonviolent alternative to capitalism might look like, such as described in chapter 5.

2. Is the campaign participatory?
This question is straightforward: how many and what sorts of people are involved, and what roles do they play?

3. Are the campaign's goals built in to its methods?
This is the ends-means question. It can be tricky, since goals and methods are so often different. In some instances answering the question is easy: if a goal is participation, then the methods should be participatory. Answers are more complex when there are multiple goals and methods. The examples in the following chapters illustrate ways to use this question for making assessments.

4. Is the campaign resistant to cooption?
This question can be difficult to answer, since cooption can occur in many ways, some of which look like success from the point of view of a particular campaign. It is important to keep in mind the ultimate goal, namely transforming and replacing capitalism. If the campaign does not continue to make a significant contribution towards attaining this goal, then cooption could well be responsible. The examples in the following chapters illustrate how this question can be answered.

What I have done in the chapters 7 to 12 is to present rough assessments, based on my own experiences and analysis, relying on studies when appropriate. These assessments are certainly not definitive. Rather, they are intended to illustrate the process of using the check list.

There is a vitally important qualification to the assessments in the following chapters. They are for the purpose of challenging, transforming and replacing capitalism—not for other purposes. A campaign might be extremely worthwhile even though it doesn't oppose or hurt capitalism. So this process of assessment is for a specific anticapitalist purpose, a point that will be emphasised on various occasions.

Notes

1 Anders Corr, *No Trespassing! Squatting, Rent Strikes, and Land Struggles Worldwide* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1999).

2 Kalle Lasn, *Culture Jam: The Uncooling of America*™ (New York: Eagle Brook, 1999) and the magazine *Adbusters.*