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# The Voluntaryist

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Whole Number 183 “If one takes care of the means, the end will take care of itself.” 4th Quarter 2019

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## Demystifying the State

By Wendy McElroy

Mystification is the process by which the commonplace is elevated to the level of the divine by those who have a vested interest in its unassailability. Government is a perfect example of mystification at work. Government is a group of individuals organized for the purpose of extracting wealth and exerting power over people and resources in a given geographic area. Ordinarily people object to and resist thieves and robbers; but in the case of government, they do not because the government has created a mystique of legitimacy about its activities.

“Government is founded on opinion,” wrote William Godwin. “A nation must have learned to respect a king, before a king can exercise any authority over them.” Past governments used the divine right of kings, by which monarchs claimed the divinity of being appointed to rule by God, as a means of instilling this respect; rebellion against the king became rebellion against the will of God. Contemporary governments have replaced this with the legitimacy derived from such concepts as “democracy,” “equality,” the “motherland,” or the “American way of life.” Such patriotic concepts have the ability to rouse feelings of awe and reverence in the population. These reactions are ingeniously channeled to support the government, and in turn help create the mystique of legitimacy which governments need to survive.

In a libertarian context, the issue of State legitimacy reduces to one question: Does any individual or group have the right to initiate force? For the libertarian, it is always illegitimate to initiate force against nonaggressors. Libertarianism is the political philosophy based on the concept of self-ownership; that is, every human being, simply by being a human being, has moral justification over his or her own body. This jurisdiction, which is called individual rights, cannot properly be violated, for this would be tantamount to claiming that human beings are not self-owners.

If individuals cannot properly violate rights, then it cannot be proper for any organization or group of individuals to do so. Certainly the number of people involved in initiating aggression has no bearing on whether or not the violation of rights is legitimate. This was clearly pointed out by a 17th-century libertarian who wrote:

What can be more absurd in nature and contrary to all common sense than to call him Thief and kill him that comes alone

with a few to rob me; and to call him Lord Protector and obey him that robs me with regiments and troops? As if to rove with 2 or 3 ships were to be a Pirate, but with 50 an Admiral? But if it be the number of adherents only, not the cause, that makes the difference between a Robber and a Protector: I will that number were defined, that we might know where the Thief ends and the Prince begins. And be able to distinguish between a Robbery and a Tax.

Although the number of thieves involved with the State is important in terms of legitimizing it, political power does not actually grow out of the barrel of a gun. The power of the State is derived from the willingness of the people to obey. Leo Tolstoy commented: “If the people refuse to render military service, if they decline to pay taxes to support that instrument of violence, an army, the present system of government cannot stand.” But people do not refuse because they have not yet come to view the government as illegitimate.

The French Revolution is commonly considered to be the birthplace of the Secular State, a State with no official ties to religion. Prior to this, the connection between Church and State rendered an invaluable service to the State; it provided an aura of legitimacy, the sense of being sanctioned by God. This gave the State the immense advantage of moral legitimacy. It could demand an obedience from its subjects which would not be possible if they did not accept its proper authority. With the advent of the secular State, it became necessary for the State to maintain this aura of proper authority without official Church alliance.

This was done through methods reminiscent of its former association with an official Church. Some of the various ways that the State now reinforces its own legitimacy are:

1. It posits itself as a superior and almost supernatural entity. The State is the final end of all moral action. Without the State there is an immoral chaos known as anarchy.

2. The State defines immorality in terms of disobedience. The ultimate sin, the ultimate crime against the State, is treason which is often punishable by death.

3. The State claims to be more than the sum total of the individuals who comprise it. Thus the State is more than the clerks and bureaucrats who embody it; it is the vehicle of a tradition and the expression of an ideal.

4. Representatives of the State distance them-

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selves from their actions. They disown personal responsibility for their actions by claiming to be agents of a superior power.

5. The laws of the State are not supposed to be open to understanding by the common man. The purpose of judges and courts is to interpret the law, which is literally the will of the State. Through the need for lawyers and the inability of jurors to pass judgement on the justice of the law, the law is further removed from the common man.

6. The State relies heavily upon rituals such as saluting the flag, the pledge of allegiance (a prayer to the State), the oath of office, voting, the national anthem, military parades and State holidays.

7. Uniforms are used to create legitimacy and to minimize individuality. From judges to policemen to postal clerks, uniforms express the rank and role of government employees.

8. The State claims to be a carrier, the transmitter of a tradition from which it derives legitimacy. The American State, for example, derives its authority from the American Revolution and the Constitution. It needs the consent of the people to survive and by linking itself to these institutions and historical events, as well as to the results of frequent and popular elections, it claims to have the support of the populace.

Without a doubt, however, the most effective method by which the State creates a mystique is through control of education. The evolution of compulsory State-controlled schooling reads like a history of political maneuvering, in which the goal of teaching children literacy skills plays a minor role. Public education is by no means inept or disordered as it is made out to be. It is an ice-cold, superb machine designed to perform one very important job. The problem is not that public schools do not work well, but rather that they do. The first goal and primary function of schools is not to educate good people, but good citizens. It is the function which we normally label State indoctrination.

The early supporters of State education understood this. Horace Mann, for example, a 19th-century supporter of public education, saw it as a means of

assimilating foreign elements into an otherwise established Protestant, puritan culture. With regard to the Irish Catholics, Mann maintained:

With the old not much can be done; but with their children, the great remedy is education. The rising generation must be taught as our children are taught. We say must be, because in many cases this can only be accomplished by coercion. . . . Children must be gathered up and forced into schools and those who resist and impede this plan, whether parents or priests, must be held accountable and punished.

From their inception, public schools were a form of social control. One Irish newspaper, which represented those children being unwillingly assimilated, observed:

The general principle upon which these compulsory schooling laws are based is radically unsound, untrue, and Atheistical. . . . It is that the education of children is not the work of the Church, or of the Family, but that it is the work of the State.

In contrast to the xenophobic fever with which many native Americans rushed to impose their cultural preferences upon immigrants, libertarians condemned State schools. Josiah Warren compared them to “paying the fox to take care of the chickens.” He realized that State control of education, like State control of religion, would create an orthodoxy which would suppress dissenting views. It would become a bureaucracy to serve the interest of the bureaucrats and those who ultimately controlled the State apparatus. When the statists insisted that compulsory, regulated education was necessary because people could not distinguish truth from falsehood and might be led astray, Herbert Spencer countered: “There is hardly a single department of life over which, for similar reasons, legislative supervision has not been, nor may be, established.”

Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it everywhere, diagnosing it incorrectly, and applying the wrong remedies. - Attributed to Groucho Marx.

Today, the ideal of social control through education has been realized. Like Pavlovian dogs, children enter and exit schools to the sound of bells. They begin each day by pledging allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and by singing the national anthem. Through political science and history classes, which present severely slanted history, they are taught to revere democracy and the Constitution. School is “the twelve-year sentence” during which children are molded into good citizens. Indeed, as we have seen, the chief function of education is to train obedient citizens. “It is inevitable that compulsory, State-regulated schooling will reflect the philosophy of the status quo,” commented

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historian Joel Spring. “It is after all those who have political and social power who gain the most benefit from the existing political climate and depend on its continuation.” In practical terms, the public school system has assumed the role of an official church by imbuing its subjects with a genuflecting respect for the State.

The State projects an image of massive strength, the image of a self-perpetuating, self-contained institution upon whose goodwill the people depend. In fact, the reverse is true. Government rests upon the goodwill of the people. Without their support, it becomes fragile and will eventually disintegrate. A government is no more powerful than the human resources, the skills, the knowledge, and attitudes of obedience it commands. Every dollar the State spends has been taken from an individual. It has no resources of its own. Every law it maintains is enforced by an individual. As Étienne de la Boétie, observed of the State: “He who abuses you so has only two eyes, has but two hands, one body, and has naught but what the least man . . . except for the advantage you give him to destroy.” That advantage is what we call the sanction of the victim or the consent which the oppressed must give to their oppressors.

“Once a regime is no longer able to frighten the people - to terrorize them into passive submission – then that regime is in big trouble.”  
- Gene Sharp on “The Two-Way – NPR News Blog,” Feb. 22, 2011.

Libertarianism is a direct attack upon the mystique of the State. It recognizes that the State is only an abstraction and reduces it to the actions of individuals. It applies the same standard of morality to the State as it would to a next-door neighbor. If it is not proper for a neighbor to tax or pass laws regulating your private life, then it cannot be proper for the State to do so. Only by elevating itself above the standards of personal morality can the State make these claims on your life.

Libertarianism commits treason in the most profound sense of that word. Not treason as it is commonly understood, for conventional treason is the act of disloyalty to a particular State, usually undertaken to benefit another State. The treason of libertarianism goes much deeper. It is a spiritual rebellion directed not at a particular State, but at the idea of any State whatsoever. Libertarians refuse to acknowledge the legitimacy of the State, whatever its geographical proximity. They commit treason on a conceptual level.

An important tool of this treason is the ability to speak clearly - what Thomas Szasz has labelled the “second sin.” The State uses language to obscure issues; it wraps a confusion of words around itself. Thus, the largest offensive military in the world is controlled by the Department of Defense. State tax

agents are from the Board of Equalization. Politicians do not lie; they give “misinformation.” Naming a thing for what it is gives you the inestimable benefit of knowing what you are talking about. Instead of taxation, libertarians speak of theft. Instead of war in the national interest, libertarians speak of mass murder in the interests of the few. This rare ability to identify and judge things for what they are distinguishes libertarians from others who wish to change society.

Conservatives and liberals demand different varieties of law and order without regard to the fact that the ultimate in order may be found in a concentration camp. On the surface, it might seem that conservatives and liberals are engaged in deadly combat, but they are actually in fundamental agreement on one crucial methodological point: namely, that the State is a proper means of achieving social change – that the use of force legitimized by the State is a proper way of controlling other people’s peaceful activities. This is their fundamental disagreement with libertarianism.

William Godwin formulated the libertarian rejection of force in epistemological terms:

Force is an expedient, the use of which must be deplored. It is contrary to the intellect, which cannot be improved but by conviction and persuasion. Violence corrupts the man who employs it and the man upon whom it is employed.

It is this very idea of legitimized force (that it is proper for the State to initiate violence while it is improper for all others to do so,) that libertarians must challenge. The State claims to have this right because we have consented to it. One of the main props of governmental legitimacy is this claim that governments rest on the consent of the governed. Even in totalitarian systems, the government goes through the farce of having elections. This façade of consent is necessary to its existence. Although it is clear that individuals do not consent to the State in the same manner in which they consent to contracts with individuals – that is, by negotiation and explicit consent – their agreement is said to be implied from a number of actions. The primary one is voting. By voting people are said to render implicit consent. Even overlooking the fact that only those who vote could be bound by this supposed consent, there are problems with this argument. For one thing, people could not commit themselves to the government for any period longer than the vote specified. If a politician were elected for one term, those who voted could not be bound for longer than that term. Those who did not vote and those who voted against the successful politician would not be bound at all. The libertarian legal theorist Lysander Spooner denied any connection between voting and consent in NO TREASON VI:

In truth even in the case of individuals, their actual voting is not to be taken as

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proof of consent, even for the time being. On the contrary, it is to be considered that, without his consent having ever been asked, a man finds himself environed by a government that he cannot resist; a government that forces him to pay money, render service, and forego the exercise of many of his natural rights, under peril of weighty punishments. He sees, too, that other men practice this tyranny over him by the use of the ballot. He sees further, that, if he will but use the ballot himself, he has some chance of relieving himself from this tyranny of others, by subjecting them to his own.

The difficulty with this "self-defense" theory of voting was pointed out by Spooner himself when he observed that one man's ballot subjects innocent third parties to the result of the political process.

No man can delegate or give to another, any right of arbitrary dominion over a third person; for that would imply a right in the first person, not only to make the third person his slave, but also a right to dispose of him as a slave still to other persons.

Individuals are also said to consent to government through the use of government facilities, like roads or post offices. People who use these facilities are said to render implied consent to the taxation which provides them. This argument, however, begs the question. It assumes that the government is the rightful owner of the services it offers. It assumes that the government is an entity capable of ownership on the same level as an individual. This is a false assumption. Since government property was originally expropriated or confiscated from individuals, the government cannot be considered the owner in any rightful sense. Only the rightful owner of goods and services can negotiate their sale and use. The State has no more right to demand taxes for roads than a thief has to demand payment for stolen property. Moreover, even if the government could own such facilities, this would not justify the coercive monopoly it has established which leaves the individual virtually no choice.

The issue of consent is intimately connected to peoples' attitudes towards the State. This attitude is much more than a conceptual matter, a matter of intellectual disagreement. Many people who claim to oppose the State obey laws to which they object. Some obey out of fear, self-interest, or a sense of helplessness. Others obey because they believe it is their moral obligation to do so. Still others are indifferent. Rousseau commented: "Slaves lose everything in their chains, even the desire of escaping from them." Slaves develop the habit of voluntary servitude or obeying their masters without offering

any resistance.

In examining this habit, it is useful to investigate the paradox of individuals who sincerely question authority and yet, seem unable to disobey the law. During the last census, there was only a scant chance of being prosecuted for failure to file. Nevertheless, many people who oppose census laws returned the form; they could not break the psychological hold of authority. This habit of obedience is often rationalized. People claim: even if a law is wrong, it must be obeyed or people will lose respect for all law; or, the actions of one person do not mean anything; or, even though I don't see the point of Vietnam, this is a crisis and we should stand together. Many rationalizations reduce to "my country right or wrong" which in practice means "my country is always right."


The underlying message is that the individual should not judge. The individual is not competent to evaluate the situation and act accordingly. When this message is internalized, it becomes the psychological cornerstone of voluntary servitude and submission to the State.

When a man is mugged in a dark alley, he screams that his rights are being violated. If, however, the same man is robbed in daylight by the I.R.S., he considers it his obligation to hand over the money. Indeed, he fills out a form to facilitate the process. The problem is that the man does not view taxation as robbery because the government has clouded its actions in an aura of legitimacy. Why? What is it about his view of the mugger that differs from his view of the government? In a word, authority. The government is viewed as a proper authority, while the mugger is not. The government is acting legally and there is a mystique covering the law.

The battle against statism today is not a battle against any particular politician. The issue is deeper. It is a battle against a way of thinking, a way of viewing the State. The main victory of the State has been within the minds of the people who obey. In commenting on the British rule over India, Leo Tolstoy wrote:

A commercial company enslaves a nation comprising two hundred millions. Tell this to a man free from superstition and he will fail to grasp what those words mean. What does it mean that thirty thousand men . . . have subdued two hundred million? Do the figures make clear that it is not the English who have enslaved the Indians, but the Indians who have enslaved themselves?

People today enslave themselves when all that freedom requires is the word "No."

[This piece originally appeared in NEITHER BULLETS NOR BALLOTS (First Printing, December, 1983).] 

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## GENE SHARP 1928 - 2018

*(Continued from page 8)*

had grown out of his doctoral work at St. Catherine's College, Oxford. Opening with an expert analysis of power, obedience and consent steeped in political theory from La Boetie to Montesquieu to Maritain, and from Godwin to Tolstoy to Gandhi, Part Two famously included his typology of 198 methods of protest, persuasion, noncooperation and nonviolent intervention. A veritable activist's toolkit, the ever-growing list was expanded upon recently in *SHARP'S DICTIONARY OF POWER AND STRUGGLE* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

Before arriving at St. Joseph House in 2009, I spent nearly a year working for Dr. Sharp and his colleague Jamila Raqib in the same East Boston row house where he had lived for decades, and on January 28th of this year, died peacefully. Supremely self-effacing and always quick with a joke, Gene also had the ability to be unequivocally direct, dissuading me once in 2010 from undertaking any sort of biographical portrait of him. He wrote via email, "My studies and my writings are what is important, not myself, much less the intricacies of how I have lived my life." It is therefore in the most reverent spirit of disobedience that I include but the briefest, most basic profile, where what Dr. Sharp might consider "irrelevant details" respectfully thread together the various strands of his work.

Gene Elmer Sharp was born in North Baltimore, Ohio, to Paul Walter Sharp (a traveling Protestant minister) and Eva Margaret Sharp (an elementary school teacher, nee Allgire), on January 21, 1928. Attending high school in nearby Columbus, Sharp went on to earn his BA and MA at Ohio State University, capping his time there with a 500-page master's thesis titled *NON-VIOLENCE: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY*. Before long the Korean War had forced him to refuse conscription into the US Army, a decision which earned him nine months in a Danbury, Connecticut prison. It was during this time that he began a correspondence with Albert Einstein, who lauded Sharp's act of defiance and in 1953 agreed to write a foreword to Sharp's first book, *GANDHI WIELDS THE WEAPON OF MORAL POWER* (Navajivan Press, 1960). Bonding over a shared affinity for the Indian revolutionary leader whose views Einstein had once described as "the most enlightened of all the political men in our time," the unlikely friendship between the seventy-four-year-old physicist and the twenty-five-year-old war resister left an indelible mark on Sharp, and served as an inspiration throughout his life.

Once out of prison, Sharp worked for a time in New York City as secretary to AJ Muste – one of the most well-known pacifists of the era and himself a Protestant minister (whose March 24, 1967 obituary in *COMMONWEAL* was penned by another of the era's

most well-known pacifists, Dorothy Day). In 1955 Sharp accepted an assistant editor position for the weekly pacifist publication *PEACE NEWS* in London. Finding himself two years later in Oslo, he worked next with Arne Naess at the Institute for Social Research, and began learning about the remarkable campaign led by Norwegian teachers resisting the pro-Nazi Quisling regime during World War II.

It was around this time that he made a profound realization and underwent a subtle, yet consequential shift in philosophy. Understanding that in virtually every successful, broad-based nonviolent movement a majority of participants will not have adopted nonviolence as a belief system, Sharp came to know that his life's work would involve somehow isolating the pragmatic from the principled. This break with traditional Gandhian thought was matched in equal measure by a recommitment to studying Gandhi's methods, no longer focusing, as he told the *BOSTON GLOBE* in 2005, "on any mahatma nonsense, but on pragmatic nonviolent struggle." And so, while maintaining throughout his life a series of ideals entirely consistent with pacifism, Sharp made what some might call a strategic choice and decisively ceased to self-identify as a pacifist.

Sharp returned to England in 1960 to pursue his doctorate in political theory at Oxford, and once back in the US, finally settled in Boston during the mid-1960s. For the next three decades, he maintained academic affiliations at Harvard University's Center for International Affairs, as well as at Southeastern Massachusetts University (currently the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth), where he held a professorship in Political Science and Sociology. Following the publication of his magnum opus in 1973, his research for the remainder of the decade culminated in twin collections of essays – *GANDHI AS A POLITICAL STRATEGIST* (Porter Sargent, 1979) and *SOCIAL POWER AND POLITICAL FREEDOM* (Porter Sargent, 1980) – featuring review essays of books by Erik Erikson, Joan Bondurant and Hannah Arendt, as well as Sharp's ideas on topics as wide-ranging as civil disobedience, the abolition of war, and the importance within a democracy of a decentralized, robust civil society.

<p>I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent. - Attributed to Gandhi.</p>
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The 1980s saw Dr. Sharp pivot more definitively in the direction of what he and other researchers had years earlier begun calling transarmament, charting a realistic path towards how society can end its reliance upon militarism through a transition to nonviolent national defense. Using first the backdrop of the Cold War in Western Europe, in *MAKING EUROPE UNCONQUERABLE* (Harper & Row, 1985) Sharp

made the case for non-violent deterrence against the Soviet nuclear threat, and nonviolent resistance in case of invasion. Towards the end of the decade, this was followed by a more generalized treatise on national security through transarmament titled CIVILIAN-BASED DEFENSE (Princeton University Press, 1990). Never one to remain content preaching only to the choir, Sharp actively sought out a diverse audience for his ideas, cognizant that his most influential conversions may be among policymakers or members of the military. This strategy helped lead Lithuania, and to some extent its northern neighbors Latvia and Estonia, to adopt in the early 1990s an official policy of civil resistance in response to potential Russian aggression - a complete anomaly on the world stage.

Yet it would be pro-democracy activists who most readily took Dr. Sharp's lessons to heart, helping his work gain the recognition it deserved through heroic efforts to resist oppression around the globe. For example, in her LETTERS FROM BURMA (Penguin Books, 1997), Aung San Suu Kyi writes of "an expression much bandied about these days which, in its Burmanized form, sounds very much like 'jeans shirt'." She goes on to explain, "the expression actually refers to Gene Sharp, the author of some works on political defiance," before mentioning that the ruling Burmese junta had been convicting people of high treason for mere possession of his books.

What have been the effects of coercion? To make one half of the world fools, and the other half hypocrites. - Attributed to Thomas Jefferson.

By the mid-to-late 1990s, these writings had then begun to spread far and wide, thanks in part to the efforts of the Albert Einstein Institution (AEI), a Boston-based nonprofit founded by Sharp in 1983 as a vehicle for the advancement and study of strategic non-violent struggle. Named for the man whose correspondence meant so much to a young draft resister three decades prior, the AEI commissioned research, conducted trainings and workshops, and managed the translation and dissemination of materials authored by Sharp and a first-rate team of researchers. Forced to scale back operations in 2004, the AEI in recent years has dedicated itself to the distribution of small-scale monographs (and within those, many of Sharp's later works), the majority of which, including translations, are available for free at aeinstein.org. Under Sharp's tutelage, the organization's executive director Jamila Raqib has become in every way the senior scholar's worthy successor, well poised to bring these ideas in front of younger generations and reintroduce, as Peter Maurin would say, "a philosophy so old that it looks like new." Assuming the mantle of leadership gradually, Raqib has proven herself a captivating speaker whose 2015 TED talk, 'The Secret to Effective Nonviolent

Resistance," has already been viewed over a million times.

As it happens, the AEI was not the first organization to dedicate part of its operating budget to the promotion of Sharp's work. For over 100 years Boston has been home to Porter Sargent Publishers, founded by prominent social critic Porter E. Sargent when no other publishing house dared promote his controversial points of view. In 1951 the eponymous outfit was passed down to his son, F. Porter Sargent, who four years later launched a small left-leaning imprint called Extending Horizons Books with a reprint of Kropotkin's MUTUAL AID. Perhaps seeing reflections of his own father's tenacity, in the early 1970s Sargent agreed to release Sharp's three-volume masterpiece after other publishing companies had turned it down. Having since put out more works by Sharp than any other author, including most recently 2005's WAGING NONVIOLENT STRUGGLE, the imprint these days is helmed by Nelia Sargent, a third-generation pacifist, war tax resister, and the current chair of the AEI's board of directors.

I got to know the Albert Einstein Institution in 2007, during a rather interesting time in the organization's history. Pared down at that point to only Sharp and Raqib, through a bequest Nelia and the rest of the board were pleased to welcome me on as a (part-time) administrative assistant. This cash-strapped reality, however, was difficult to reconcile with the accusations that had begun rolling in, painting Sharp and the AEI as covert US government agents, secretly funded by the CIA. First it was Hugo Chavez who denounced Gene publicly in a July 2007 televised speech. Whip-smart and with a hint of rhetorical jiu-jitsu, less than ten days later Gene had fired off a missive to the Venezuelan leader suggesting that if Chavez was truly concerned with anti-democratic forces conspiring against him, Gene would be happy to send along a booklet he had co-authored called THE ANTI-COUP (Albert Einstein Institution, 2003), which detailed nonviolent ways for democratic governments to guard against political upheaval. Then perhaps even more improbably, Jamila and I arrived at Gene's one morning in early 2008 to news that a fairly ludicrous Iranian propaganda video had surfaced overnight, complete with a cartoon version of Gene sitting in a nefarious-looking boardroom at the White House, plotting the overthrow of the Ayatollah alongside John McCain and George Soros. Though these are of course extreme examples, it was eye-opening to witness first-hand how simply providing sincere advice to those wishing to learn more about nonviolent struggle was enough to earn the ire and contempt of authoritarians from across the political spectrum.

But for every detractor the partisans had been arriving in spades. In response to accusations of taking direction from the Pentagon, CIA and Department of State, an open letter in support of Dr.

Sharp was signed by scores of US foreign policy critics, including Noam Chomsky, Howard Zinn and Daniel Ellsberg. Indeed, throughout a seven-decade career as a writer and a thinker, Dr. Sharp earned accolades from figures as politically distinct as Einstein, Coretta Scott King, Republican Senator Mark O. Hatfield, US diplomat George F. Kennan, the Dalai Lama and Nobel laureate in economics Thomas C. Schelling (who each at some point contributed a foreword to one of his books). He was the focus of an exquisitely shot biographical film allowing an unparalleled view into his life and work (2011's HOW TO START A REVOLUTION), and in 2015 was honored with an official proclamation by the City of Boston declaring April 27th Gene Sharp Day. Internationally, he had been nominated twice for the Nobel Peace Prize by the American Friends Service Committee (the AFSC themselves won in 1947) and was a 2012 recipient of Sweden's Right Livelihood Award. Some of the most welcome praise, however, came not from the peace community, but from hard-nosed realists, such as former Lithuanian defense minister Audrius Butkevicius and retired US Army colonel Bob Helvey. Both came to see the wisdom in what Sharp was preaching, driven primarily by an interest in adopting the most effective means of struggle available, but at the same time not unmoved by the significant humanitarian advantages to nonviolent methods. As Helvey says in the film, "Vietnam convinced me that we need to have an alternative to killing people."

As long as people believe in government, wars will never end.

- Larken Rose in THE DAILY BELL, 1/29/2012

In a 2003 interview with Canada's PEACE MAGAZINE, Dr. Sharp tells the story of an audience member at one of his talks accusing him of simply taking the violence out of war. Of course for Sharp that was precisely the point, though for many peace activists this is where his ideas are at their most provocative in that, according to him, conflict is not at all something to be avoided. Instead, a cornerstone of Sharp's philosophy is that conflict is in fact inevitable, and at times even necessary in order to stand up for justice when those around us are being oppressed. Whether we choose to engage in violent or nonviolent conflict, however, is entirely up to us, and as Catholic Workers committed to nonviolence we find ourselves compelled to learn how to resist war and injustice most effectively. In the preface to Part One of his 1973 classic, POWER AND STRUGGLE Sharp writes the following: "Mere advocacy of nonviolent alternatives will not necessarily produce any change... unless they are accurately perceived as being at least as effective as the violent alternatives." Within this statement lies the key to finally shepherding pacifist ideals from the fringes of society into the mainstream, and it is in precisely this way that few political philosophers have done more to advance the movement

that Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin began presciently in 1933.

Dr. Sharp is remembered today by his brother, Richard, as well as nieces, nephews, cousins, and a growing number of people around the world whose lives he has affected in some way. I remember him as a kind yet stern fatherly figure with whom I didn't always see eye-to-eye, but whose sincere concern that I wasn't meeting my own potential managed to push me in the right direction. Always happy to welcome me through the front door whenever I would go back and visit, I think it gave Gene solace to know how the CW community had welcomed me in New York, that the War Resisters League had eventually taken me in as well, and that later I had found a home in a doctoral program myself. History, on the other hand, will remember Gene Sharp as an advocate for oppressed peoples who believed in giving activists the tools for their own liberation. He will be remembered, too, as a groundbreaking theorist for how nonviolent methods can be used to resist injustice, dictatorship, even genocide; and through civilian-based defense have the potential to make even war itself obsolete. Finally, Dr. Sharp will be memorialized as the founder of an entire academic discipline centered around civil resistance, whose discoveries, like those of Einstein before him, will forever change the way we perceive the world. For instance, while many nonviolent movements are spontaneous and severely lacking in terms of a larger strategy, as Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan noted in their recent book WHY CIVIL RESISTANCE WORKS (Columbia University Press, 2012), a great many of them nonetheless end up miraculously victorious. Understanding this deeply through decades of research, Dr. Sharp had the audacity to wonder aloud how much more effective these movements could be if nonviolent struggle came to be seen as a legitimate area of research, deserving of even a fraction of the resources that over centuries have been poured into furthering the ruthlessness of organized violence.

In biographical portraits throughout the years, Dr. Sharp had been variously referred to as the godfather of nonviolent resistance, the Clausewitz of nonviolent warfare or simply the Machiavelli of nonviolence. Although perhaps at face value the latter appellation does have an impressive ring, I rather tend to disagree, as it places far too high an estimation on the value of Machiavellian thought. In a lecture on civilian-based defense Sharp once said, "The doctrine that 'power comes out the barrel of a gun' is not a humanitarian - much less a socialist - doctrine. It's a militarist and a fascist doctrine. And besides, it isn't true... power in fact comes from people" (at precisely the ten-minute mark, accessible on the Vimeo platform). [Editor's note: <https://vimeo.com/8934568> is the link for the video.] If, despite all odds, we succeed at keeping this in mind, as history marches forth it may well be Sharp's ideas that prove the most revolutionary. **V**

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## GENE SHARP 1928-2018

By Will Travers

[Editor's Note: In early 1983, The Voluntaryists (with the Center for Libertarian Studies) sponsored a one-day conference in New York City on "The Politics of Nonviolent Action." Gene Sharp presented the keynote address. Also, I wrote two reviews of his books in early issues of this newsletter. As this article concludes, Gene Sharp – for good reasons - was known as the "godfather of nonviolent resistance." This article is reprinted from THE CATHOLIC WORKER (August-September 2018, pages 4-5).]

One week after his 90th birthday in January, the peace community - along with champions of social justice and self-determination around the world - lost a truly foundational figure. Gene Sharp was among history's most prolific and tireless advocates of nonviolent action, whose increasingly global influence belied a humble, near-monastic way of life, religiously devoted to his work, his dogs and his orchids.

Owing in large part to the underground circulation in dozens of languages of his writings worldwide, Dr. Sharp gained more renown in recent decades than he had been used to. The press he began receiving in the years following the Eastern European color revolutions, and especially in response to the nonviolent movements that helped constitute the Arab

Spring, concerned mainly a condensed, conceptual blueprint he had drawn up for Burmese activists in 1993 called FROM DICTATORSHIP TO DEMOCRACY. Outlining in stark terms the wisdom of strategically planned nonviolent resistance to an authoritarian regime, the lessons contained therein traveled easy, and would later prove critical to the success of groups such as Otpor! in Serbia, and the April 6 Youth Movement in Egypt. With the downfall of dictators from Milošević to Mubarak in mind, Sharp's words have filled dissidents with hope and tyrants with fear. In 2016, a public reading of Sharp's work in Luanda was enough for the Angolan government to sentence a group of demonstrators to prison terms of up to 8½ years. The offending main idea was put succinctly by Dr. Sharp in a 2012 article on CNN.com: "Dictatorships are never as strong as they think they are, and people are never as weak as they think they are."

The direct use of force is such a poor solution to any problem, it is generally employed only by small children and large nations. - David Friedman.

Not all of Sharp's fame however arrived late in life. He had in fact become well known to an earlier generation of activists for the three tomes that made up THE POLITICS OF NONVIOLENT ACTION (Porter Sargent, 1973), a 900-page *chef-d'oeuvre* that  
(Continued on page 5)

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