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conversion to peacemaking:  
two conversations

## The Bread is Rising

The bread is rising! an IFOR staff member remarked recently. He wasn't talking about events in our kitchen but the fact that this is a time of exciting growth and change within the IFOR movement. Some changes are small for example, this summer we hope to move into a larger (and quieter) office here in Alkmaar. Other changes are big new branches forming in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean; a regional network developing in the Pacific and Southeast Asia; and expansion of our communications work.

Also we are preparing for next year's Council in Assisi. IFOR Councils are infrequent but life-giving events where branch representatives renew old friendships and begin new ones. They give our movement its general direction. So it isn't surprising that this is a time of animated discussion about the future direction of IFOR.

One contribution to this discussion is the following paper by Bernt Jonsson, a former chairman of the FOR branch in Sweden, who works at the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs as liaison with peace groups and peace research institutions. (Sweden, which hasn't been at war since 1814, is the only country so far to have such a government position.)

Bernt's paper grows out of discussion within the Swedish FOR. Its circulation among IFOR branches has sparked lively discussion. Extracts from some of the responses follow the article. You may have your own ideas and comments. Please send them to us. The discussion begun here will certainly be pouring into future forums in RI.

Jim Forest

Security, Politics  
and Nonviolence

by Bernt Jonsson

In the world of power, security is seen as the fruit of force. Survival of the fittest that's the Darwinian creed in the debate on national security. Enough security is the ideal smaller states long for. Superiority, or at least equal security, is what the superpowers are trying to reach.

Contrary to this concept, nonviolence is rooted in a belief in vulnerability as a more profound way to achieve strength and security. Most often (but not always) this belief has a religious basis, in which dominating patterns of

thinking and values are turned upside down. The paradox of vulnerability gives security a spiritual context which gives it a deeper meaning and credibility.

In the political debate there is a lot of discussion about how to achieve security, mostly in military terms which tend to define the conditions for realpolitik. Regrettably, this discussion has a tendency to be more rigid than any other political debate, probably because any deviator can be depicted as a potential traitor, as being soft on communism or a capitalist lackey or just naive. Any divergent opinion tends to be regarded as disturbing the liturgy.

Although this seems to hold good for all countries, every country has its own frame of reference, its own political history and geopolitical conditions, its own solution to the security problems. Positions taken obtain the status of self-evident truths in the national context.

Consequently, the world of politics (power) and the world of spirit (non-violence) show a great contrast. Does this mean that they are irreconcilable? The answer is very crucial, not only to those directly involved in political activities and responsibilities. The lack of interest the IFOR community as a whole has shown over the years concerning this fundamental question is therefore worrying.

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IFOR has a brilliant record as a proponent of nonviolence as a spiritual force. It has an impressive nonviolent tradition and is in many ways the only truly international forum for thinking on the philosophy of nonviolence. Its importance exceeds by far its membership numbers. Drawing from different religious traditions, IFOR has been a spiritual challenge, not least to the Christian churches, even if this varies among different countries and may be decreasing. The infighting with the just war doctrine, the nonviolence education in the Americas, the initiatives for a mutual understanding in West Asia, the support for a nonviolent struggle in South Africa, etc. all these activities have been very essential and important, not least showing that nonviolence and international solidarity are not incom-

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patible, as was argued by radicals in the 60s.

So far, there is a very positive IFOR story to tell, but story-telling is not enough. Embarrassing questions must be asked: Is the work of IFOR politically relevant? Is there any thinking, any discussion going on concerning the political efficiency of alternative nonviolent methods? (IFOR meaning here not only for the Alkmaar office and the Steering Committee but the whole IFOR family with national branches, cteh)

My impression is that the answer to the second question is NO, and that the first question really doesn't bother the IFOR community in general. This may be an unfair statement, but there seems to be almost no demand at all within IFOR for a political strategy for peace. Such a strategy is of course extremely difficult to develop, but the lack of interest within IFOR is frightening. Homo politicus, advocating nonviolence—is this not a provisional goal to work for?

The nonviolent revolution in the Philippines and its prehistory has of course a certain validity as an objection to the analysis above. Similarly, the democratic take-overs in Latin America have a story to tell. Still, on which conditions is a successful, nonviolent mass movement able to stick to its spiritual basis, or will it in any case be transformed in the process? Not every one of the participants can be expected to be moved by the same spirit.

Further, the intellectual analysis of when, where and under which conditions nonviolence could be used as an efficient means for necessary political change seems to be lacking. The absence of such a political peace strategy obstructs the possibility of getting mass organizations like the churches and the trade unions to become strong advocates for nonviolent methods, but many nonviolence adherents just don't seem to care.

At the other end of the line you have the new peace movement of the 80s, very political in its approach, its one issue campaigning style, its obsession with weapons, etc. It has been working primarily within the traditional military and strategic paradigm, which is also reflected in the international disarmament negotiating community. This approach has also failed to be very ef-

minor successes. It has not really been able to offer alternative concepts of security, thereby liberating people from the old nightmare about the necessity of deterrence.

What then? Is it possible to build a bridge between the peace movement and the political world, between the peace activists and the politicians, between the peaceniks and the public opinion? A bridge of common understanding of the ways to peace? Let me suggest some points for an effort to build such a bridge:

Point of departure

To begin with it is necessary to analyze the different contexts and consequences for the application of nonviolence:

a) Nonviolence as a protest technique in

â\200\224democratic states

â\200\224totalitarian states

(neither should be understood in absolute terms)

b) Nonviolence as an instrument for structural change through

â\200\224gradual evolution

â\200\224revolutionary turnover (including the difficult immediate-after-the-revolution-process and the use of power)

c) Nonviolence as a conflict-solving strategy for peace in relation to

â\200\224(potential) civil war situations

â\200\224international conflict (armed struggle or struggle with the potential to become armed)

Each one of these aspects is in itself too large to be handled by IFORâ\200\231s own resources, but maybe IFOR could at least stimulate some peace researchers to do a first compilation and summary of existing findings. This would also be a way of discovering the white spots, still not explored.

Points to approach

In order to build a bridge you need to find a bridge-abutment on the other side. In this case, is it possible to find an analysis and values, approved by a broad public opinion, which could serve as such a bridge-abutment for efforts by nonviolence adherents? My answer is in the affirmative:

a) The UN Charter and the Declaration on Human Rights are international documents, expressing governmental opinions and beliefs in truly human values

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like peace, human dignity, freedom, justice, etc. (Yes, praxis is less impressive than the theoretical statements, but that is true not only in politics!)

b) By a consensus decision the first UN Special Session on Disarmament 1978 adopted a critical analysis of the devastating consequences of the arms race, which by and large could have been written by the international peace movement community.

c) Democratic governments (and a lot of others) now and then state their beliefs in human rights like freedom of expression, of assembly, of religion, of political elections, etc.

d) The Palme Commission launched the concept of common security, thereby introducing a genuinely international and perhaps even holistic view of security and thereby also cancelling the old and dangerous doctrine of deterrence.

e) UN studies like those on disarmament and development and on concepts of security contain elements of IFOR thinking, too.

To approach these different elements and to combine them into one strategic point as a bridge-abutment is not easy, but should not be totally impossible. The other side, this new territory, is not alien land to nonviolence advocates. And the nonviolence intruders are not alien to the public opinion, even if they are not yet discovered and recognized as friends.

A choice of realism

Within the peace movement it is usual to accuse the proponents of realpolitik to be not realistic enough, and vice versa. From both sides the accusation often has a certain undertone of moralizing. Regardless of how important morals are, moralizing will never liberate people. Stupidity, suicidal behaviour or whatever concept you prefer in order to describe the existing security patterns will not be replaced through moralizing sermons.

A majority can possibly afford to be unrealistic; it may be able to suppress the reality, at least for the time being. A minority cannot afford such a luxury. It has to be realistic, and the nonviolence advocates cannot but be realistic and face a choice: either they accept

the important role as faithful witnesses



for peace as the end of the story (this alternative will lead to a lot of suffering, some success stories with great symbolic value, and now and then a Nobel Peace Prize), or they tryâ\200\224in addition to the above alternativeâ\200\224to challenge the political, economic and military structures by developing a political strategy/program for nonviolent change. This alternative involves changes both in software and hardware, attitudes and structures, values and weapons, and it includes also the risk of getting dirty hands through compromises.

In order to make this latter alternative at all possible a deeper understanding of politics is necessary within the peace movement, and not least within IFOR (at the same time a deepened commitment to the spirituality in nonviolence is needed, too). One possibility might be to draw upon the profound political knowledge, gathered over the years by the Churches Commission on International Affairs. Another possibility could be to use politically active IFOR members, not least those within the Jewish community.

Why not then launch an IFOR project for 1987-93, the result of which should be a platform on security, politics and nonviolence, adaptable to different local, national, regional and international circumstances? The primary result ought to be an increased political awareness within the IFOR community. Such a project needs much planning, careful use of work already done, cooperation with other movements and institutions and, no doubt, some substantial fundraising. But wouldnâ\200\231t it be worth this huge effort?

Nonviolence prophets are inspiring and necessary, but to be posthumously respected is not enough. Peace rhetoric is important, but not enough. Peace movements are a must, but they are not enough. Anti-weapons campaigns are not to be despised, but they are not enough. Nonviolence as a spiritual force is crucial, but not an end in itself. What is needed is also a long term political strategy for nonviolent change, a prophetic realism substituting the traditional realpolitik. Å®

Yes, but...

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Franco Perna, Friends World Committee  
for Consultation, European and Near

East Section, Luxembourg

On the whole I think Bernt Jonsson's paper is thought provoking and challenging. However, I feel the IFOR has indirectly contributed to political development much more than one would reasonably expect given the nature and limitation of the movement particularly through some of its outstanding members (see a sample list on the IFOR general leaflet) from Gandhi to M.L. King.

Personally I would welcome a more direct political involvement by the IFOR, but one should also be fully aware of the risks that such a move could engender, e.g. becoming a political organisation, with the handicap of not having the support from the masses, simply because it is not a mass movement.

I wonder, therefore, whether a serious attempt (through a major project, if need be) to emphasize the IFOR catalyst role, operating through other forces, also political, might not be more effective. ()

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responses

Iain Macnab

Ron Beasley, IFOR Vice President,  
United Kingdom

A brief response to Bernt Jonsson's paper: it is broad in its sweep, but I wonder if it is focused enough. The aspect to do with politics I think needs more detailed treatment. One basic question is whether or not the achievement of human rights, justice, true peace, etc. is beyond politics? Because no matter which government is in power, and there are a diminishing number of true democracies anyway, and because power sharing is not understood, nor the price for such power sharing acceptable by the majority, whether or not the peace movement as such has to go beyond politics? For instance is civil disobedience, or holy obedience not beyond politics? It has to go on no matter what the political line is in any country. So there is a sense in which we have a realistic view of politics, that our goals are not achievable by normal political processes. Bernt does not face this issue. Â®



Max Deml, IFOR Representative at the  
United Nations in Vienna

â\200\234The choice is no longer between  
violence and nonviolence. It is between  
nonviolence and nonexistenceâ\200\231 Martin  
Luther King stated a quarter of a cen-  
tury ago. How long is â\200\234no longerâ\200\235?  
Since the start of the cold war in the  
1950s even church leaders justify the  
strategy of atomic deterrence as still  
ethically acceptable, as long as there is  
no â\200\230betterâ\200\235 alternative found. How  
long can they afford to continue waiting  
without looking for a solution on their  
own?

I think most of the IFOR members  
agree with Bernt Jonsson that there is  
a â\200\234long term political strategy for non-  
violent changeâ\200\235 needed. IFOR seems  
to be one of the â\200\234fittestâ\200\235 communities  
to build the proposed bridge between  
the world of politics and the world of  
spirit. To the three aspects mentioned  
in the â\200\234point of departureâ\200\235 I would add  
another one: the difference between  
nonviolence as an individual attitude/  
behaviour and as a social or political  
strategy. Because one of the great ques-  
tions is: why can peaceful young men  
turn into soldiers who kill each other  
in times of war? Nonviolence at the  
individual level does not guarantee non-  
violence at a group or state level (and  
vice versa).

Thinking of organisations or states that  
might do the â\200\234first stepâ\200\235 to a (more)  
nonviolent strategy, only two categories  
come into my mind:

1) The UN peacekeeping forces (â\200\230â\200\230sol-  
diers without enemiesâ\200\235 as the present  
Cyprus commander puts it): maybe  
once they try it (again) without any  
weapons. IFOR could make up a train-  
ing program, etc.

2) Neutral and nonalligned states: for  
instance Costa Rica exists without an  
army, but it would take a long time  
in Switzerland to make clear that a  
people can survive without army or  
even if it would lose a war...

Within IFOR and outside there is a lot  
of â\200\234work already done,â\200\235 and itâ\200\231s worth  
while listing up historical events, in  
order to launch an IFOR project for  
the next years, as Bernt Jonsson pro-  
poses to do. This first small response  
should encourage IFOR to build a  
working group on this important proj-  
ect. Â®

Diana Francis, IFOR President, United Kingdom

I read with interest Bernt Jonsson's article on 'Security, Politics and Non-violence'. Its plea for realism, for a form of nonviolence which can be applied to life at all levels, which is more than a pious notion or courageous exception this I heartily endorse. I am sure, too, that some of us have been too ready to stay with the rejection of violence and too little engaged in the search for alternatives. But taking the IFOR fellowship as a whole, I do not share his gloomy analysis and irritation: I can think of so many branches, groups and individuals who are deeply and actively concerned with the workings of society, both locally and internationally, and with the development of alternative models.

It is possible, though, that some would reject 'politics' as an appropriate or realistic vehicle for the sort of changes they envisage. According to my dictionary, politics is the 'science and art of government,' which in turn means 'rule' or 'control'. A system in which some rule and others are ruled 'however the rulers are chosen' is fundamentally unacceptable to some; and those of us who do not find the idea of government fundamentally unacceptable may nonetheless observe that politics as we know it is quite largely about the struggle for domination by individuals, parties, social classes, nations and international groupings and only secondarily about creative social organisation. What is described as desire for security is often, in fact, a desire for superiority.

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Fear and the need to feel secure are nonetheless real feelings which are constantly exploited by politicians, who, as Bernt says, offer their people security by force. I do not see nonviolence as offering security through vulnerability although powerlessness does have its own power. Human vulnerability physical, mental and emotional is a fact. We go through this life like snails without a shell. Our soft bodies can be crushed, mutilated or destroyed by any number of happenings, and the same is true of our feelings.

Nothing we can ever do will alter this fundamental, inescapable vulnerability. Armed or unarmed, we can be wiped out at any time. Wars as a means of security are a disasterâ\200\224that is certain. But we can never be really secure in any human sense.

Once that basic fact is recognized we can begin to consider what increases our security, among and between each other and in our environment; what defends human dignity and leads towards co-existence and the blossoming rather than the extinction of the human race. Nonviolence cannot achieve the impossible in the current world situation or indeed in the long term; but it can be seen as the way forward which people need to want, offering methods of assertiveness which are not destructive and which do not by their nature provoke attack.

I do not believe that the relationship of politics to nonviolence is that of power versus spirit. Nonviolence has a spiritual or philosophical basisâ\200\224and a rational one also; but it is something to be lived in personal, social and structural ways and expressed materially.

Political systems also have some sort of philosophical basis, and are about the mechanics of co-existence. In so far as they deviate from their ideals, their malfunctioning is spiritual in origin. I would add these ideological foundations of politics to the list of â\200\234points of approachâ\200\235 which Bernt cites for the coming together of politics and non-violence. They are an expression of tâ\200\230he caring, nurturing, creative tendencies which are one side of human nature: the same tendencies which motivate us to want to transform ourselves and society.

Nonviolence, even more than politics, is about all aspects of life, and peace depends upon many things. It would therefore, in my view, be a mistake to focus on security and the tactics of nonviolence as separate from its other aspects. Techniques which stop short of physical violence can be employed in cruel ways and for unjust ends, and those who have organized mass campaigns of nonviolence have in fact made spiritual commitments and attitudes to opponents a fundamental issue not an optional extra just as military leaders have done.

Moreover, without basic shifts in attitude to property and personal worth and responsibility, without a revolution in local and international economics perhaps, ultimately, without the abandonment of the very concept of the nation state no true peace, no real measure of corporate security is possible.

We cannot reach the new society in an instant. There must be steps on the way. But if we try to move on one front only, or snap off little bits of nonviolence for immediate use, we shall be wasting the energy and strength and creative potential of the whole. Nonviolent, civilian defence, for instance, is a realistic option only in the context of a group of people, of whatever size, who have developed a nonviolent economy which poses no major threat to other groupings; who have united around certain fundamental attitudes to their neighbors and to themselves and who have been sufficiently committed to these things to prepare themselves in a systematic way, acknowledging a deep level of personal responsibility for the well-being of their own society and the world beyond.

The Green Party in my country is attempting to adopt something of this approach a real sign of hope. What we need is a completely new kind of politics or social organization which expresses both the values and the methods of nonviolence and is a vehicle of co-operation rather than control.

I have problems with Bernt's use of the word strategy, which again in my dictionary is defined as generalship, the art of war (literal and figurative); management of an army or armies in a campaign, art of so moving or disposing troops or ships as to impose upon the enemy the place and time and conditions for fighting preferred by oneself.

Even if one understands the word in

its figurative sense (!), it suggests a kind of planning which seems to me wildly unrealistic in global and sometimes even local terms. Military strategies fail as often as not, for all the expertise and advance planning that goes into them. There is so much we cannot know in advance and unexpected turns of events can have such a crucial effect.

â\200\234Strategyâ\200\235 also suggests a kind of manipulation and central, unified control which goes counter to the spirit of nonviolence and indeed counter to the way things really work.

Maybe this is mere verbal quibble and I am misunderstanding Berntâ\200\231s intent. But I believe that nonviolence is something organic which can grow when people come together in human-sized groups to experience their own identity, responsibility and powerâ\200\224as well as limitationsâ\200\224and to plan and act together. (I do believe that we need to bring together the various strands of our thinking and our resources and develop them further.)

I think Bernt underestimates the importance of â\200\230â\200\230storiesâ\200\235 and â\200\230â\200\230witnessesâ\200\235. They are a source of inspiration, but also of proof and of know-how. They vary in scale and in the type of situation they describe, but together amount to a very impressive dossier from which there is a great deal to be learnt. Maybe more could be done to extract general principles from these stories. There has also been considerable study made of the question of social or civilian or nonviolent defence, though doubtless much more could be done. But I think peopleâ\200\231s assumptions and wants need to be changedâ\200\224and stories are one way of doing thisâ\200\224before they will be ready to listen to such radically new proposals.

Economic transformation seems to me to be the most intractable problem of all. The â\200\234constructive programâ\200\235 approach of building alternatives is the only one I can get my mind aroundâ\200\224with the addition of local policies designed to dismantle, bit by bit, the international economic structures which are crushing most of the worldâ\200\231s population and fuelling the arms race. We need more thinking on this, and more sharing of ideas and knowledge.

We should not ignore, however, the considerable and revolutionary expertise which is available in the form of seminars (led most notably by Jean and Hildegard Goss-Mayr, but also by many others) which are constructed to combine analysis, and information, in-



spiration and involvement, and which give people tools to apply to their own cultural and political setting, with attention paid to methods and strategies (yes!) as well as spiritual foundations.

There are also available courses in mediation and conflict resolution, skills which will always be needed.

I believe that the studies and compilations which Bernt proposes would be of great valueâ\200\224not least in revealing the wealth of resources already available and renewing our sense of possibility. At our Council meeting in 1988, we shall have the opportunity to think further about the questions that Bernt has raised. Any preparatory work that can be done will contribute to the fruitfulness of our discussions then. @