

One tries to undo him—tries, in the current idiom, to “blow his mind”—only in the sense that one tries to shake him out of former attitudes and force him to appraise the situation now in a way that takes into consideration your needs as well as his. One is able to do this—able in a real sense to change his mind (rather than to drive him out of it)—precisely because one reassures him about his personal safety all the time that one keeps disrupting the order of things that he has known to date. When—under your constant pressure—it becomes to his own interest to adapt himself to change, he is able to do so. Fear for himself does not prevent him. In this sense a liberation movement that is nonviolent sets the oppressor free as well as the oppressed.

The Genius of Nonviolence

The most common charge leveled against nonviolence is that it counts upon touching the heart of an adversary—who is more than likely to be stony of heart. His heart, his conscience need not be touched. His mind has been. The point is that you prevent him from reacting out of fear—in mindless reflex action. You also prevent him from being able to justify to others certain kinds of actions that he would like to take against you—and may for a while attempt to take. Here one can speak of still another sense in which nonviolence gives one greater control. If the antagonist is unjustifiably harsh in his countermeasures, and continues to be, one will slowly win away from him allies and supporters—some of them having consciences more active than his perhaps; or perhaps all of them simply caring about presenting a certain image, caring for one reason or another about public relations. An adversary might seem to be immovable. One could nevertheless move him finally by taking away from him the props of his power—those men upon whose support he depends. The special genius of nonviolence is that it can draw to our side not only natural allies—who are enabled gradually to

recognize that they are allies because in confrontation with us their minds are not blurred by fear but challenged (and they begin to refuse orders, as several soldiers did in October at the Pentagon). Even beyond this, it can move to act on our behalf elements in society who have no such natural inclination. When the Quebec to Guantanamo walkers were fasting in jail in Albany, Georgia, the men who finally put most pressure upon the authorities to release them and let them walk through town were clergymen not at all sympathetic either to the walkers as individuals or to the message on their signs and leaflets. Nonviolent tactics can move into action on our behalf men not naturally inclined to act for us; whereas violent tactics draw into actions that do harm us men for whom it is not at all natural to act against us. A painful example of this was Martin Luther King's act of declaring that the authorities were right in calling out troops to deal with the ghetto uprisings. John Gerassi provided another example in a talk I heard him give about revolutionary prospect in Latin America. He told how a plan on the part of a rebel group to gain support among the people by assassinating policemen backfired—because every slain policeman in that society of very large families had so many relatives, all unable to see the death as a political act that might help them, able to see it only as a personal loss. Violence makes men “dizzy;” it disturbs the vision, makes them see only their own immediate losses and fear of losses. Any widespread resort to violence in this country by those seeking change could produce such vertigo among the population at large that the authorities would be sure to be given more and more liberty to take repressive measures—in the name of “Order.”

Knowing the Enemy

Some readers might comment that such a development would be educational, for the underlying nature of the society would then stand re-