

# NONVIOLENCE WORKS!

## 60 Nonviolent Victories of the Past Century

*This is a selection of the more newsworthy examples of nonviolent actions, but in fact, when you think about it, nonviolence is the norm. In everyday life - and between nations - disputes are usually solved without resorting to violence. We must remember that violence is the exception; nonviolence is normal.*



**1. Transvaal, South Africa 1907-14** Gandhi successfully campaigned for the legal rights of Indians in Transvaal by refusing to comply with unjust laws and restrictions.

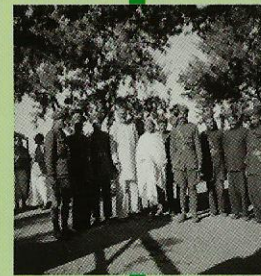
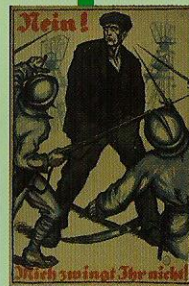


**2. Brazil 1910** Peace made between European settlers and the Chavantes tribe. At the first attempt 25 unarmed volunteers sent by General Rondon were killed. At the second, peace was achieved.

**3. England 1915-18** The stand of First World War Conscientious Objectors, even against threats of execution in France, won the legal right 'not to kill'.

**4. India 1918-47** Among many nonviolent campaigns against British imperial rule Gandhi challenged government salt tax laws by a symbolic march (1930) to make sea salt. The British reacted with brutal force against the nonviolent insurrection but independence was granted in 1947.

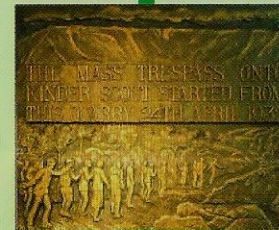
**5. The Ruhr, Germany 1923** Passive resistance to French and Belgian occupying forces prevented the removal of coal demanded in reparations from Germany.



**6. North-West Frontier Province, India 1929** Abdul Ghaffar Khan mobilised the traditionally fierce Pathans into a disciplined nonviolent army to resist British rule.

**7. England 1932** A mass trespass in the Peak District resulted in arrests but started the movement towards rights of access to Britain's moorland.

**8. Liberia 1932** The country was torn by civil strife. A League of Nations mediator was able to discover the root of the problem, disarm the warring tribes, and end the dispute.



**9. Norway 1942** Teachers refused to co-operate with the pro-Nazi Quisling regime and, although many endured prison, the obligation to teach Nazi doctrines in schools had to be withdrawn.

**10. Denmark 1943** SS troops were unable to stop the widespread movement of non-cooperation and strikes against the Nazi occupation. Almost all 7000 Jewish citizens were saved by Denmark's defiant population.



**11. Berlin, Germany 1943** 'Aryan' wives of German Jews obtained the release of their husbands by their persistent protest vigil outside the building in Rosenstrasse where they were detained.

**12. Bulgaria 1943** Orthodox Church leaders in Bulgaria successfully resisted the deportation of Jews during the Second World War.

**13. Guatemala 1944** The dictator General Ubico was overthrown by the peaceful demonstrations of students, and a strike which paralysed the capital, despite police violence.



**14. Vorkuta, USSR 1953** About 250,000 political prisoners were held in camps and forced to work in appalling conditions in coal mines. The prisoners went on strike and, in spite of bloody reprisals, stood firm until conditions were improved.



**15. USA 1955** The campaign for racial justice in the USA started with the year-long bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, launched after Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a segregated bus.

**16. Sicily, Italy 1956** Danilo Dolci organised a 'strike in reverse' to draw attention to destitute people. Unemployed workers provided free labour to build roads despite local government opposition.

**17. Nagaland, India 1964** Church leaders were in the forefront of attempts to achieve a peaceful solution to the dispute with Indian Government Forces.

**18. Cyprus 1964** The UN Blue Berets kept the peace between Greek and Turkish Cypriots for many years in one of their 50+ peacekeeping operations.

**19. California, USA 1965-70** Cesar Chavez, a Christian community organiser, unionised the exploited migrant farmworkers. A national grape boycott persuaded growers to negotiate better work conditions.

**20. Northern Ireland 1968-98** Although the nonviolent civil rights campaign was sabotaged by paramilitary violence, the quiet work of the Corrymeela Community and similar groups built bridges across the sectarian divide, preparing the way for a ceasefire and settlement.

**21. Ahmedabad, India 1969** Shanti Sena peace brigades placed themselves between Muslim and Hindu rioters and brought peace after four months of patient reconciliation work.

**22. The Larzac plateau, France 1970-81** Demonstrations, including the driving of sheep into Paris, forced the government to cancel plans to extend a military camp over grazing land.

**23. Culebra, Puerto Rico 1971-75** Local people occupied a US naval firing zone, rebuilding a symbolic chapel and disrupting military exercises until the island was abandoned as a target zone.



**24. (a) Baltimore, USA 1971** Canoes manned by Philadelphia peace people tried to stop a ship exporting arms to a war in Pakistan. Coastguards helped the arms to get through, but the publicity resulted in the arms shipments being stopped. Similar tactics were used in **(b) New Zealand 1976-84** when a 'Peace Squadron' blocked nuclear vessels entering Auckland harbour, and in **(c) Australia 1989-90** against imports of rainforest timber, which were then reduced.

**25. Himalayan foothills, India 1972** 'Tree-huggers' from 200 villages prevented deforestation and timber auctions in a series of local actions.

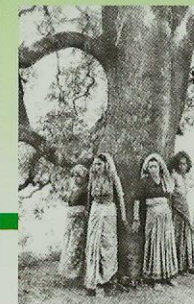
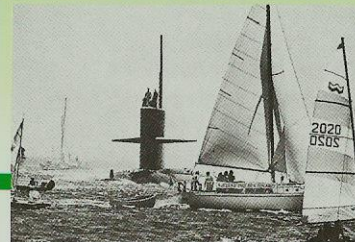
**26. Whyl, Germany 1974** Local people occupied the site of a proposed nuclear power station for nearly a year and stopped its construction. None was ever built there.

**27. Sao Paulo, Brazil 1974** When unpaid workmen at a cement factory went on strike they were denounced as Communists. Their seven-year nonviolent struggle, in dialogue with the owners, ensured plenty of publicity. Finally, when black-leg drivers threatened to run over strikers, the police intervened. The workers received payment.

**28. Czechoslovakia 1977** Signing 'Charter 77' for human rights took great courage, but it led on to the 'velvet revolution' and the restoration of democracy in 1989.

**29. Buenos Aires, Argentina 1977-83** The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, whose children had been abducted, ignored intimidation and kept up a weekly silent witness which made human rights abuses visible and helped to establish democracy.

**30. Alagamar, Brazil 1980** Sugar barons appropriated land. The dispossessed returned to grow their own crops but these were pulled up. Public opinion supported the peasants and the government made extensive land grants to them.





**31. Poland 1980-89** Solidarity, the trade union which began with a strike in the Gdansk shipyard, used religious and national sentiment to shape opposition and nonviolently overthrow the Communist government.

**32. Hungary 1980-89** Gradual change from a totalitarian to a democratic government led to the opening of the borders and the Soufflé Revolution (Communism collapsed like a soufflé).

**33. The Netherlands 1982** A popular movement of 400,000 demonstrated against the siting of cruise missiles in their country. None were deployed there.

**34. Nicaragua 1983-90** Nearly 4,000 'Witness for Peace' volunteers from peace groups in the USA came to live in villages that were under threat from attack by Contra guerrillas armed and trained by the US.

**35. Philippines 1986** In three days of breathtaking tension crowds of civilians in Manila defied and then won round the army, bringing about the fall of President Marcos after 13 years of martial law.

**36. Baltic Republics 1988-91** Estonians, Lithuanians and Latvians took part in the 600km human chain that linked the three state capitals. When Lithuania declared independence the Soviets sent in tanks but the people stood firm, without resorting to violence, and the troops eventually withdrew. In Estonia vast crowds gathered in Riga to sing traditional Estonian songs (banned by the USSR) - the 'singing' revolution. All three states gained independence without violence.

**37. East Germany 1989** Mass prayer meetings, held since 1981 at St Nicholas Church in Leipzig, spread across the country and the Communist government was forced out in favour of free elections. There was no bloodshed.

**38. Kazakhstan 1989-91** Popular demonstrations and political lobbying against a nuclear test site halted the tests and then brought about its closure.



**39. Mozambique 1989-92** The Rome-based Community of Sant' Egidio, trusted because of its humanitarian work, brokered an agreement between RENAMO and FRELIMO forces, and ended ten years of war.

**40. Mongolia 1990** Six months of strikes, hunger strikes and public action forced a hard-line regime to move towards democracy, press freedom and economic reform.

**41. South Africa 1990** Nelson Mandela, by his attitude of forgiveness at the end of Apartheid, gave South Africa the hope of a peaceful future. The apartheid regime itself was undermined by sporting, investment, and other boycotts conducted both inside and outside the country.

**42. Russia 1991** The people of Moscow resisted a coup against President Gorbachev as crowds blocked tanks, separating the military from the Russian parliament.

**43. Thailand 1991-2** The military seized power. Prayer and fasting by monks for seven months gave rise to popular demonstrations such that democratic rule was reinstated in the face of military repression.

**44. Mali 1991-6** Violent conflict between armed Tuareg and Arab groups and the government was resolved by prolonged negotiation in local inter-community meetings, followed by a ceremonial bonfire of weapons.

**45. Somalia 1991-2000** Internecine warfare was interrupted by women crossing lines between the various tribes, defusing tension, releasing hostages, organizing relief and demobilization programmes, and preparing a peace process.

**46. Ecuador 1992** Thousands of tribal people marched from upper Amazonia to Quito and camped in the park for three weeks. The government granted them formal title to more than 4,000 square miles of their traditional homelands.



**47. USA 1993** Churches brought black and white gangland leaders to a meeting in Kansas City by offering a vision of community building.

**48. Ghana 1994-6** The Nairobi Peace Initiative brought a resolution to armed ethnic conflict between the peoples of Northern Ghana.

**49. Peru/Ecuador 1995-98** An American conflict management team brokered a peaceful solution to a border dispute which had provoked fighting 34 times since 1884.

**50. Uganda 1998** The Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative worked nonviolently to end armed conflict, to train volunteers in mediation and to assist victims of the civil war between the Lord's Resistance Army and government forces.

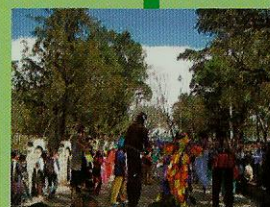
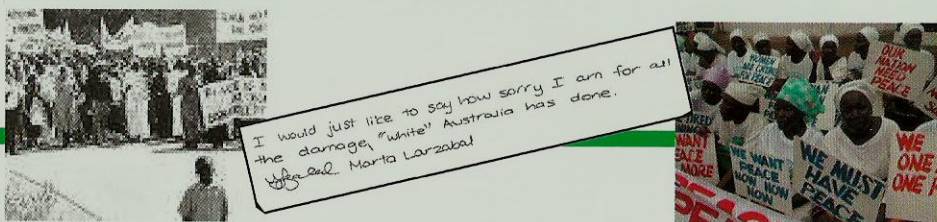
**51. Australia 1998** The 'Sorry Book' campaign collected signatures from thousands of Australians apologizing for past violation of the rights of the indigenous population.

**52. Serbia 1998-2000** Student-led marches in Belgrade, along with the use of graffiti, humour, and mobile phones, brought down President Milosevic who had refused to accept election defeat.

**53. Palestine Israel 2001** Five Israeli women started to monitor the checkpoints which control the movement of Palestinians. Derided as unpatriotic, MACHSOM / CheckpointWatch now has several hundred women observers, working in shifts to monitor the behaviour of soldiers and police, protect the civil rights of Palestinians, and publicise what they witness.

**54. Nigeria 2002** 150 village women shut down an oil operation for ten days, capturing from boats several terminals of the Chevron Texaco pipeline. Threatening to undress if ejected, the women demanded jobs and improved village amenities from the oil company.

**55. Liberia 2002-06** Blockades and sit-ins by a coalition of Christian and Muslim women persuaded the men to negotiate an end to decades-long civil war. They successfully mobilized support for the presidential election of Africa's first female head of state.



**56. Ukraine 2004** The 'orange' revolution emerged after widespread popular protests against a corrupt election achieved a re-run.

**57. Palestine Israel 2005** Villagers in Bil'in adopted a nonviolent strategy to oppose the confiscation of their land to build illegal Israeli settlements and the separation wall. They won an Israeli Supreme Court ruling that the route of the wall must be altered. Their continuing weekly vigil at the wall is met by army violence.

**58. Guatemala 2007** Young stilt walkers used circus acts and carnival in the streets to transform the climate of violence spread by brutal youth gangs.

**59. Thailand 2008** Thousands of anti-government demonstrators shut down Bangkok's airport for eight days. The standoff ended after a court disbanded the ruling party and barred the prime minister from office for electoral fraud.

**60. Pakistan 2009** Popular protests and a march on Islamabad led by the country's lawyers forced the President to reinstate the chief justice, summarily deposed two years earlier by the military regime.

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## **NONVIOLENCE IS NORMAL VIOLENCE IS THE EXCEPTION**

**These examples of active nonviolence show that all round the world people have recognised the power of nonviolence to confront injustice and bring about change. Some describe a short episode or campaign; others required great persistence and involved many small steps over a long period of time before change occurred. Nonviolence does not offer a 'one size fits all' solution.**

### **Failures? Nonviolent victories are not like fairy tales**

They do not have 'happy ever after' endings any more than violence does. The population has to remain constantly vigilant and, as in the Philippines in 2001, their nonviolent actions may have to be repeated. In some cases success may be short-lived because the new situation arising from a nonviolent campaign leads to violence (as, for example, after Indian independence and partition of the country).

Many nonviolent actions – such as the protests of the students in Tiananmen Square, China, in 1989 – have not achieved 'victory' but have changed political and public consciousness. Other campaigns have heightened awareness of the danger, injustices and problems associated with, for example, nuclear weapons, road building, GM crops, discrimination against women, the arms trade etc.

### **Learning how nonviolence works**

An important development of the past century has been the growth of conflict resolution courses that train people in peacemaking – in schools, churches, communities and between nations. The Quakers and Mennonites have led this development. The University of Bradford has a large department of peace studies which attracts students from all over the world.

In his books the American scholar Gene Sharp lists nearly 200 techniques of nonviolent action to achieve justice, overthrow oppressors, or fight for environmental causes. Thus the nonviolent approach demonstrated many centuries ago by Jesus – confronting the powerful, exposing injustice, breaking the rules to challenge the culture and assert human dignity, suffering oneself rather than retaliate with violence – has been imaginatively multiplied over the years. The philosophy remains the same: for the oppressed to reclaim and use their power, leaving open the possibility of converting the oppressor.

## **WANT TO KNOW MORE?**

**These stories and others can be found in the following books:**

*A Force More Powerful: a Century of Nonviolent Conflict*, Peter Ackerman and Jack DuVall, Palgrave 2000  
*Christian Peacemaking: from Heritage to Hope*, Daniel Buttry, Judson Press 1994  
*Open Hands*, ed. Barbara Butler, Kevin Mayhew 1998  
*People Power and Protest since 1945: a Bibliography of Nonviolent Action*, eds April Carter, Howard Clark & Michael Randle, Housmans 2006  
*Give Peace a Chance*, John Ferguson, Gooday 1988  
*War Prevention Works: 50 Stories of People Resolving Conflicts*, Dylan Matthews, Oxford Research Group 2001  
*Waging Nonviolent Struggle*, Gene Sharp, Porter Sargeant 2005  
*Protest, Power and Change: an Encyclopaedia of Nonviolent Action*, eds. Roger S. Powers & William B. Vogeley, Garland 1997

**These publications can be ordered from Pax Christi:**

*From Violence to Wholeness: a 10-part Process in the Spirituality and Practice of Active Nonviolence*, Ken Butigan and Patricia Bruno OP, Pace e Bene 2002  
*Engage: Exploring Nonviolent Living*, Butigan, Slattery et al., Pace e Bene 2005  
*The Way of Peace: Exploring Nonviolence for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Shannon McManimon, Pax Christi USA 1987  
*Jesus and Nonviolence: a Third Way*, Walter Wink, Fortress Press 2003

**Look at:**

*A Force More Powerful* - DVD of six half-hour nonviolent success stories available to hire from Pax Christi or Fellowship of Reconciliation  
[www.aforcemorepowerful.org](http://www.aforcemorepowerful.org)  
[www.wagingnonviolence.org](http://www.wagingnonviolence.org)

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