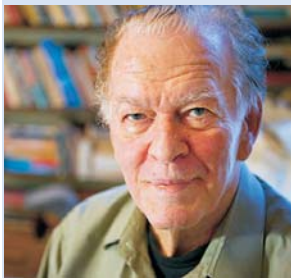


THE PHILOSOPHY OF NONVIOLENCE



GENE SHARP

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Every protest movement is unique and different from all others. However, an analytical approach can reveal what they have in common: (a) anger over reduced economic benefits from the State, and (b) confusion about what types of action should be used to express that anger.

It may seem that the most effective policy with regard to such groups is total prohibition, but this is actually not the case. An increase in the number of groups in society does not necessarily lead to increased tension. In fact, an increase in independent groups is often beneficial. However, in potential conflicts such groups need to act wisely and nonviolently; problems arise when they promote chaos and violence rather than a peaceful diversity of ideas and opinions. **Diverse groups are beneficial to a democratic society so long as they act nonviolently.**

Unfortunately, politicians sometimes use the excited mood of certain social groups to provoke violence in society. In order to prevent this kind of problem it is important to develop an increased knowledge of

nonviolent methods of protest and how to properly apply these methods while respecting the views of others. While conflict is inevitable and political violence is certainly widespread, both can be minimized and channeled into nonviolent expression, which is ultimately the most effective way to maintain and expand democratic societies.

The world is facing a great deal of serious problems, from weapons of mass destruction and terrorism, to the threat of dictatorships, hunger, military action and control, racism, and ethnic prejudices. Furthermore, there is the increasing problem of figuring out appropriate strategies for increasing and maintaining democratic systems. Of course, it is unlikely that these problems can be solved within the next ten years. What is important, however, is that in the coming decade significant steps can be taken to reduce the severity of these problems and thus contribute to their ultimate resolution. To this end, and for the sake of global development, humanity must learn to adopt nonviolent methods of struggle. ■

CITY FRINGE UNDERDOGS

Zakhar Prilepin

■ *A wave of social revolts has swept across Europe over the past year and something similar has also happened in Russia on December 11, 2010. Do you think that there is something special about the fact that youth are protesting in Russia?*

Since I live in Russia and not in Europe, I am contaminated with the Russian brand of ‘conspirology’ rather than the European one. As a result, it sometimes seems to me that the public will in Europe is expressed in a rather more spontaneous manner than is the case in Russia, where even the most spontaneous mass campaigns are always covertly manipulated by particular public figures. Apart from that, civil society and civil solidarity tend to be much stronger in Europe, while the influence that these factors have in Russia is rather minimal. Russians are more socially estranged than is the case with Europeans and we never attend public rallies unless the issues are of critical importance to us personally. The events that took place on Manezhnaya Square are no exception to this rule.

■ *What is the most effective state policy to pursue in a situation involving youth revolt?*

From the point of view of the State, **the most effective policy would be to buy up a certain part of the right-wing activists and intimidate a certain part of the fan-movement.** In other words, the State should, by all means, try to neutralise the activity being carried out by that part of the youth who rallied on Manezhnaya Square. However, taking recourse to such measures would effectively cause the government to delay finding an immediate solution to what are the obvious and pressing problems that will ultimately shape the future of the country.

One of the most obvious problems today is the so-called ethnic issue. It is improper to ignore the fact that the federal mega-tranches flowing into the Caucasian republics tend to be embezzled by many representatives of ethnic minorities, who direct these colossal tax-exempt funds towards their countries. This is something that produces resentment with a major part of the population, which ultimately puts pressure on the government to do something to stop it. However, any active measures in this direction would require a revolution from above in order to change the nature of the current authorities. Russia currently finds itself at a stage in its development where an anti-bureaucratic revolution from above would certainly do it some good.

We’ve seen football fans rallying on Manezhnaya Square and it is important to realise why they actually did that: they are fighting against bureaucracy. Bureaucracy in sports clubs and in the field of sports is practically identical to the bureaucracy that exists in the government and political sphere, since bureaucracy always pushes to preserve the *status quo* as its principal aim, rather than actually resolving problems that are putting the survival of the entire society in danger.

■ *Why is today’s youth choosing such scandalous and shocking methods for their struggle? Is it because the State has abandoned young people?*

CITY FRINGE UNDERDOGS

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I do not think that the state has forgotten about youth and youth movements. On the contrary, for example, take the recent meeting of Vladislav Surkov with representatives of a number of youth organisations. During that meeting, the first deputy head of the Presidential Administration advised activists of the youth movements to train and focus their brains and muscles because they are going to need them in the near future. This is a clear sign that youth organisations are going to get additional financing soon.

As for those young people who do not fit into such political projects for either objective or subjective reasons, their interests are still left unattended to. This part of the young population - in fact its major part - is either living in total prostration or is surviving with a feeling that it is lacking any firm foundation under its feet. The events on Manezhnaya Square are a clear indication of that fact. One would expect football fans to be most loyal to the current authorities. After all, the government did its best to host the World Football Championship in Russia. However, apparently this is not enough to gain their loyalty. According to their code of honour, the authorities are answering their demands by betraying their own and effectively leaving them without any protection by releasing the murderers of football fans. This segment of youth cannot be bought off with mere show-casing of lip service. As goes the song of the popular rock group 'Chaif', these are **'city fringe underdogs for whom the value of honour is foremost'**.

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■ *Does the government currently have any instruments capable of effectively controlling these 'city fringe underdogs' so to speak?*

These groups can be effectively dealt with only through the application of

one instrument: if the government succeeds in integrating its rhetoric and practice. These things currently stand too far apart in modern-day Russia. Every day on TV, we hear constant glorification in the direction of Russia and all kinds of talk about how it is rising from its knees, but today's teenagers are witnessing quite different things in their everyday life. These youngsters are active and willing to do things. They need something big and real to invest themselves in. A new major railroad line's construction, a new space launch site, or some other huge national infrastructural project could otherwise become their main task or calling in life.

■ *Many people say that, in 2010, we have seen the crushing of both the systemic and non-systemic opposition. Who do you suppose could become a new oppositional force to the current authorities?*

I am not aware of such opinions. One thing that I do know is that the opposition remains non-systemic. Once it was associated with the activities of the now-outlawed National-Bolshevik Party and today it is associated with the activities of the Other Russia Party. **The rest of the opposition cannot really be called an opposition by definition since the notion of 'systemic' opposition is actually nonsense.** The fact that both the governmental authorities and the so-called 'systemic' opposition is using this very term constantly makes it all the more absurd.

■ *In your opinion, what is the main problem or challenge that the generation of the 2000s is passing on to the generation of the 2010s?*

The main legacy of the first of these two groups is the simplification and the



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reduction to amoebic forms of virtually any and all intellectual and cultural meanings. As a consequence, it appears that, in Russia, there is no social treaty of any sort between the authorities and the masses or between the authorities and the country's intellectuals. What we have instead is this or that sort of simulacra in the form of some meaningless personal encounters or some sort of grand well-orchestrated public events. There is absolutely no dialogue between the people and government and, of course, there is also no dialogue between the intellectuals and the authorities. The concept of the intelligentsia has totally lost its meaning due to the fact that modern-day Russia has, for all purposes, been left without an intelligentsia as such. Contemporary Russia either reckons with people who have a million dollars or else it reckons with nobody. This is the legacy that we are proceeding to move on with into the new decade. ■

Zakhar Prilepin was speaking with Ksenia Kolkunova