

should keep in mind the heroic experiment in revolution of the Russian people, which began with the moral support of virtually all progressive movements in the world, and which eventually produced a state which killed millions of its own citizens in purges and forced labour camps, oppressed the nations of Eastern Europe, and to this day is still imprisoning writers who seek to exercise the most elementary freedoms.

We must ask our brothers and sisters in the movements of violent liberation whether they are really certain that out of the bloodshed of their revolution a just society can be created; and whether they believe the Russian experience was simply the result of theoretical mistakes, tactical errors, and Western intervention (all of which were certainly factors) or whether it was not in large part of the basic mistake of thinking that violence, both during the revolution and in solving economic and social problems, could bring justice and freedom.

Man is not free when he is subjected to violence and therefore the struggle against violence must be seen in the context of a revolutionary effort to liberate humanity. We know that violence takes many forms, and that in addition to the direct violence of guns and bombs there is the silent violence of disease, hunger, and the dehumanisation of men and women caught up in exploitative systems.

With a reticence that comes from our knowledge that we do not have answers to many of the problems of revolution, we must say that men should not organise violence against one another, whether in revolution, in civil war, or in wars between nations. If it is argued that our position is utopian and that men can turn to nonviolence only after the revolution, we reply that unless we hold firmly to nonviolence now, the day will never come when all of us learn to live without violence. The roots of the future are here and now, in our lives and actions.

But our unwavering commitment to nonviolence does not mean we are hostile to the revolutionary movements of our time, even though on certain fundamental issues we may disagree with some of them. It is impossible for us to be morally 'neutral', for example, in the struggle between the people of Vietnam and the American government, any more than we were able to be morally 'neutral' 12 years ago in the struggle between the people of Hungary and the Soviet Union. We do not support the violent *means* used by the NLF and Hanoi, but we do support their *objective* in seeking the liberation of Vietnam from foreign domination. We particularly emphasise our support for our friends in the Buddhist movement, who at great risk and with little support from world opinion, have sought to achieve self-determination without using violence. It is particularly important for pacifists to maintain close contact with these elements in the revolutionary movements which quietly hold to nonviolence.

We do not romanticise nonviolence and know better than anyone else its setbacks. But we ask our friends who feel they have no

choice but to use violent means for liberation not to overlook the problems they face. The violence of revolution destroys the innocent just as surely as does the violence of the oppressor. The American soldier in Vietnam is not the cause of American imperialism but only its agent. He, no less than the Vietnamese he is oppressing, is a victim of American imperialism. And there are those who are innocent in a more obvious sense such as civilians who are inevitably killed in the course of the struggle. Clearly one has to distinguish between the violence of the Americans which is criminal and that of the Vietnamese which, by contrast, is tragic.

We have to consider the argument of those who criticise pacifists because they do not have an answer to the problem, for example, of South Africa. We know this and are haunted by our own limitations. But just as every nonviolent movement in South Africa has so far failed, so has every violent movement. There are moments in history when we find situations that cannot be immediately resolved either by violence or by nonviolence. In Spain, for example, there have been organised appeals for violent action against Franco for the past 20 years and yet Franco still holds power. The murder of Martin Luther King is often cited as evidence of a final defeat of nonviolence. Surely it is no more or less so than the murder of Che Guevara is evidence of a final defeat for violence in Bolivia?

We remind all pacifists and all sections of the WRI that the greatest single contribution we can make to the liberation movements is not by becoming entangled in the debate over whether or not such movements should use violence, but by actively working to bring an end to colonialism and imperialism by attacking its centres of power in the West, for these are the factors which drive peoples towards the tragedy of violence, and, for too many of the oppressed seem to exclude the options they might otherwise have, for more gradual and nonviolent methods of social revolution.

One of the basic reasons why we hold to nonviolence, even when it seems to have failed or when it cannot offer a ready answer, is because the nonviolent revolution does not seek the liberation simply of a class or race or nation. It seeks the liberation of mankind. It is our experience that violence shifts the burden of suffering and injustice from one group to another, that it liberates one group but imprisons another, that it destroys one authoritarian structure but creates another.

We salute those who are using nonviolent action in their struggle in spite of the current trends and pressures towards violence. We also salute our brothers and sisters in the various liberation movements. We will work with them when it is possible but without yielding up our belief that the foundation of the future must be laid in the present, that a society without violence must begin with revolutionaries who will not use violence.



If you believe that war is a crime against humanity – if when you think of war, violence and oppression you believe conflict can be solved differently, then the WRI needs you this year in Vedchhi.



Please tick ✓ where applicable:

- ☐ Please send me a registration form and a list of the workshops planned.
- ☐ I cannot attend the Triennial but please send me all the Background papers and Reports. (Cost £10)
- ☐ Here is a donation of . . . . . to help someone from a "Third World" country travel to the Triennial.

Total amount enclosed . . . . .

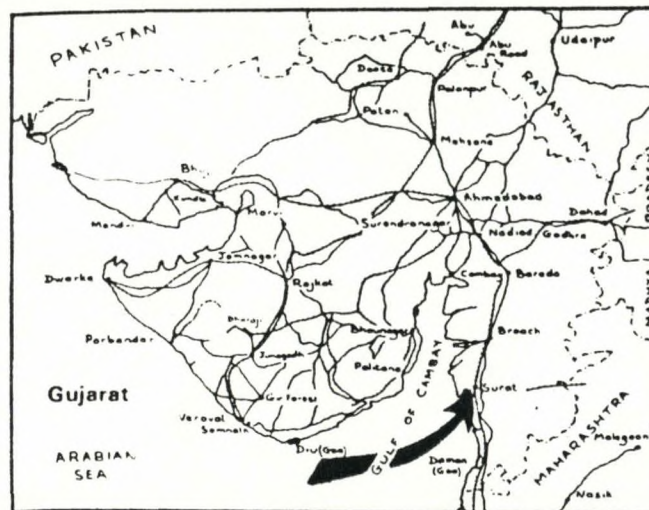
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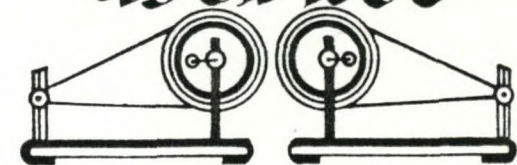


"War is a crime against humanity. I am therefore determined not to support any kind of war and to strive for the removal of all causes of war"

WRI. 1921.



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WAR RESISTERS' INTERNATIONAL XVIII TRIENNIAL

**RESISTANCE  
AND  
RECONSTRUCTION**

SWARAJ ASHRAM · VEDCHHI · INDIA





# RESISTANCE AND RECONSTRUCTION THE POWER OF NON VIOLENCE

## RESISTANCE AND RECONSTRUCTION: THE POWER OF NONVIOLENCE

Year by year humankind's capacity for destruction mounts. In terms of the nuclear threat alone, the world's nuclear arsenals contain the equivalent of more than 3 tons of high explosive for each person in the world, while nuclear reactors are producing huge quantities of waste which will remain highly toxic for generations. But in many other ways, too, the very means to life are in danger of destruction.

For some parts of the world, catastrophe seems imminent; for others, it has already arrived in the form of war, famine, disease and pollution.

The need for change is urgent. But if the scale of the present peril is greater than ever, and if some hazards are only now being identified, the roots of the global crisis are deep. The change required therefore has to be seen as a fundamental and far-reaching process.

### WRI's role

War Resisters' International is based upon its members' commitment to seek change: to resist war and to strive to eradicate the causes of war. This personal commitment has to lead to collective action — both to challenge the systems of domination and exploitation which imperil our planet and to create societies which respect life.

### The Eighteenth Triennial

The Triennial conference in Vedchhi will play a vital part in developing WRI's world programme. It is where we evaluate our progress, re-affirm our commitment and work out how to strengthen our effectiveness. Aware of the dangers the world faces, we seek to kindle the vision of a world without war and oppression. As well as sharing our experiences of resistance and constructive work, we seek to propose strategies of action, to determine our priorities and to set realistic goals.

For this Triennial, WRI is making a greater effort than ever to reach out beyond Europe and North America to

encourage the participation of grass-roots activists from Asia, Central and South America, and Africa.

The conference venue is itself a statement. It is in India, a country which has throughout this century provided inspiring examples of the power of nonviolent action — of movements which both resist injustice and undertake constructive work to rebuild society from the bottom. But also a country which continues to suffer the depredations of international capital — most recently witnessed in the poisoning of thousands of people who lived near the Union Carbide plant at Bhopal.

By attending the conference or submitting working papers, war resisters have the opportunity to tell of their own struggles and to learn about those in other parts of the world. They can express their views not only on how the International should develop but on the direction of the international peace movement as a whole. By taking up our Indian hosts' offer to arrange visits to Gandhian projects — before and after the Triennial — participants from outside India can gain new insights and consolidate relationships with the Indian movement.

### THE TRIENNIAL THEME AND AGENDA

The main theme of the Triennial is **Resistance and Reconstruction: the power of nonviolence**. In particular, we will focus on: **Strategies for De-militarisation** (e.g. resisting foreign bases, strategies against military intervention, undoing the military bloc system);

**Re-building a balanced ecology** (e.g. appropriate technology and nonviolent economics, food and disarmament, competition for resources);

**Human rights and self-determination** (e.g. militarism and repression, violence against women/women against violence, racism and cultural imperialism, conscientious objection).

Each day, the Triennial will begin with a short report from a particular campaign. We will then divide into some 20 workshops which will each meet for the four

morning sessions. This will give people the opportunity to explore a subject in depth, taking it from analysis through to proposing a strategy.

The afternoons will offer a variety of workshops and presentations, giving people the chance to exchange information or to show material from their own campaigns. Suggestions for afternoon workshops are welcome. We need background papers for workshops, some of which will be mailed in September and others handed out at the conference. We also hope that many participants will bring slideshows or poster and literature displays to present at the Conference.

The evenings will mainly be unscheduled but we know that there will be music and impromptu meetings.

*Dec 30* — WRI Council members arrive at Vedchhi.

*Dec 31* — Morning, WRI Council meets, Conference participants register  
— Afternoon, Opening session of conference (plenary)  
— Evening, Western New Year's Eve Party

*Jan 1-4* — Open Conference workshops

*Jan 5-6* — WRI business meeting

*Jan 7* — Meeting of newly-elected WRI Council

*A fuller agenda for the morning sessions will be available with the registration form. Would-be participants should register by the end of August, as the conference is restricted to 300 people. Child care provided during work sessions.*

*The conference fee will be £30, including the background mailing, plus 180 rupees board for the Open Conference, or 240 rupees from December 31 — January 7 (morning).*

### The venue

The Swaraj Ashram is a Gandhian community in Vedchhi, some 55 kms from Surat in Gujarat. Accommodation there will be in dormitories unless you have a disability or any other special need. Details of how to get there, advice on what to bring and health precautions to take in India, and information on tours before and after the Conference will all be sent out in our pre-Conference mailing in September.

31 DECEMBER 1985 - 7 JANUARY 1986



SWARAJ ASHRAM · VEDCHHI · INDIA



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