

In Defense of Violence

Ted Kaczynski

When I wrote to the New York Times offering to desist from terrorism if my manuscript were published, I promised that the manifesto would not explicitly advocate violence, because I assumed that the mainstream media would refuse to publish anything that did advocate violence. For that reason, in *Industrial Society and Its Future* (ISIF), I understated the probable role of violence in revolution. In reality, I think it is almost certain that a successful revolution against the techno-industrial system will have to involve violence at some point.

Force and violence are the ultimate sanction. When a major social conflict cannot be resolved through compromise, the issue is settled by physical force or the threat of it. As I argued in ISIF, paragraphs 125–135, if we try to compromise with technology we play a losing game. The system never is and never will be satisfied with any stable situation — it seeks always to expand its power and will never permanently tolerate anything that remains outside of its control (ISIF, paragraph 164). Thus the conflict between us and the system is irreconcilable and in the end can be resolved only through physical force. The system depends on force and violence to maintain itself — that’s what the police and the army are for. If we revolutionaries renounce all recourse to violence, we put ourselves at a crippling disadvantage vis-a-vis the system. I am not advocating indiscriminate or automatic violence; in many situations nonviolent tactics are the most effective. But I do maintain that violence is an important part of the revolutionary’s tool kit, and that we should be prepared to use it when we can gain an important advantage by doing so.

The reason why the system teaches us to be horrified at violence is that violence of any kind is dangerous to the system. The system requires order above all; it needs people who are docile and obedient and don’t make trouble. Roger Lane has shown that prior to the Industrial Revolution, American society was far more tolerant of violence than it is today, and that the emphasis on nonviolence arose in response to the industrial system’s need for an orderly and docile citizenry. (See Chapter 12 of *Violence in America: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, edited by Hugh Davis Graham and Ted Robert Gurr.) Allowing for some exceptions, the leaders of the system are quite sincere in their rejection of violence. Though the system has to use violence to preserve itself, it usually tries to keep the level of violence— including its own violence — as low as it can, because violence intensifies the social stresses that endanger the system. The “bad cop” who beats people up is in his own irrational way a rebel against the system. To the most rational and self-disciplined members of the technocracy, the ideal cop is one who uses just enough force to maintain public order and social discipline, and no more than just enough.

Most people who insist on nonviolence as a matter of principle fall into one of three categories. First, there are the conformists — those who believe in nonviolence because the system has successfully brainwashed them. Second, there are the cowards. Third, there are the saints — those rather rare people whose belief in nonviolence is motivated by genuine compassion.

As for the conformists and the cowards, they are beneath contempt and we need not say any more about them. The saints, on the other hand, deserve our respect. If we accepted their principles we would in effect be giving up the revolution, but all the same they may have an important role to play. Through the turmoil and violence that will probably accompany a revolution, they can help to keep alive the ideal of kindness and compassion; and- who knows? — maybe some day they will even have a practical effect in reducing the amount of cruelty in human society. But by themselves they cannot win a revolution. For that, tough fighters are needed.

That most opposition to violence in our society is merely a matter of conformity or social convention can be seen from the way in which attitudes toward violence vary according to the circumstances under which it is carried out. When violence is carried out with the approval of the system (as in war, for instance), most people take it for granted. They are horrified by violence only when it is disapproved by the system.

My lawyers brought a neuropsychologist, a Dr. Watson, to give me some tests to verify that I wasn't crazy. After the testing was done, Dr. Watson asked me some questions about my bombings. Among other things, he asked me how I felt about the impact of my actions on the "victims" and their families, and he seemed rather troubled that an intelligent man like me could kill people without feeling much guilt and without worrying very much about the impact on the dead men's families. But if I had been a soldier who had killed or maimed enemy soldiers in a war, it would not even have occurred to Dr. Watson to ask how I felt about the impact on the victims or their families. No one expects a soldier to hesitate in killing enemy soldiers or to worry about how the dead men's families feel, and very few soldiers do worry about such things. This shows that most people's attitude toward violence is governed not by compassion but by social convention.

The breakdown of the techno-industrial system will almost certainly involve widespread physical hardship. If the breakdown is sudden, it will mean actual starvation, because there will be no pesticides and chemical fertilizers, no high-tech hybrid seeds, no fuel or spare parts for farm machinery, no trucks and trains to carry produce to the cities. Even if the system disintegrates somewhat gradually over a period of a few decades, it is almost inconceivable that the reduction of the population and the transition to subsistence agriculture can be carried out in a smooth and orderly way. Many people will suffer for lack of food or other physical necessities, and under such circumstances there is sure to be widespread social disorder and therefore fighting. Look at history! The rapid breakdown of a civilization is almost always accompanied by violence, and the more advanced the civilization the greater the violence.

Modern middle-class culture is exceptional in the degree to which it tries to suppress aggression, which is a normal part of the behavioral repertoire of human beings and of most other mammals. Most societies throughout human history have been more tolerant of aggression than today's middle class. It is true that there have been a few primitive cultures that were strictly nonviolent, and the ideologies of passivity and nonviolence have held these cultures up as examples to show how violent modern society is in contrast to the noble savage. But with conscious or unconscious dishonesty they completely ignore the far more numerous primitive cultures that permit a much greater degree of violence than modern middle-class morality does. For example,

Derrick Jensen, in *Listening to the Land* (Sierra Club Books, 1995, page 3) lauds the Okanagan Indians of British Columbia for the fact that they never engage in physical violence, but not a word does he say in acknowledgement of the fact that the majority of North American Indian tribes were distinctly warlike. Many of the tribes even cultivated war as something noble and admirable, and fought unnecessary wars simply because the young men wanted to win military glory. (Lest the feminists try to blame it all on those nasty male beasts, it should be pointed out that the men were egged on by the women. Among the warlike tribes, every woman wanted her sons to be brave warriors, and one of the reasons why the young men wanted to win military glory was that it made them popular with the young ladies.)

Of course, primitive warfare was very different from modern warfare. Today soldiers fight in order to satisfy the ambitions of politicians or dictators; in major wars they usually are conscripted, and even if they volunteer they generally do so only because they have been brainwashed by propaganda. The modern battlefield is a slaughterhouse in which the skill and courage of an individual soldier have little effect on his chances of survival. In contrast, the American Indians fought either to protect themselves and their families or because they wanted to fight. Their battles were on a small scale, so that the individual warrior was not reduced to an insignificant bit of cannon fodder. And their conflicts resulted in none of the massive environmental damage that accompanies modern warfare. In fact, since their wars kept the population down, the environmental consequences were positive.

Eliminating all violence would increase our life-expectancy, but life-expectancy in modern society is probably longer than it has ever been in any other society, yet modern society is deeply troubled. There have been many other societies in which life-expectancy has been much shorter, but in which there has been far less stress, frustration, anxiety or other psychological pain. This shows that life-expectancy is not of paramount importance for human happiness; still less is it important for human freedom.

I don't want to give the impression that I consider violence desirable for its own sake. Quite the contrary. I would much rather see people live together without hurting each other physically, economically, psychological, or in any other way. But the elimination of violence should not be at the top of our list of priorities. The first priority must be to get rid of the techno-industrial system.

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