

## WORKSHOPS IN NONVIOLENCE -- WHY?

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In these few pages we have pulled together a few practical examples of situations which can be used in workshops on nonviolence, in training sessions prior to action, etc. Emphasis is on civil rights. We are indebted to Charles Walker, Middle Atlantic Regional College Secretary of American Friends Service Committee, for some of these ideas. We cannot emphasize sufficiently the importance of workshops and training sessions, especially just before actions are undertaken -- no matter how imperfect they may be. Some of the reasons for this are:

1. If you're going into action in a potentially dangerous situation, you need to have confidence in yourself and in your buddies. In the workshop you have a chance to get to know yourself and your buddies and to see how you and they behave in a kind of mock action. You also get an idea of what to expect, and what you are afraid of -- and why. All this helps your morale, and the morale of the group. It makes for a better group, one which is more likely to succeed out in the streets.
2. Everybody has tensions. Especially those of us who are victims of segregation. When we get out in the streets we need to keep our personal tensions under control. But in a crisis, tensions build up. People blow up. In a long campaign people begin to "crack"; in other words, they suffer from "battle fatigue." In workshop situations everybody has a chance to blow off steam, to get rid of a lot of those tensions. Then when we get into the streets we are cooled off. Let loose in the workshop so you can be cool in the streets, make cool decisions, carry out a cool action.

### Brief Note to Instructors

- These particular scenarios are meant only to provide guidelines for a practical demonstration of role-playing. The instructor should modify the situations in accordance with local conditions and specific issues.
- In any single session it will be impossible to run through all the scenarios from beginning to end; the instructor should choose those situations which will fit the local requirements, and should also feel free to interrupt and stop the action at any particular point. There is no logical or conclusive "end" to any of these scenarios. But:
- The instructor should try not to interrupt the scenario until he is ready to stop it altogether because otherwise the flow of ideas, feelings, and action will be blocked.
- It is extremely important to raise the right questions to the group at the end of each scenario. Let the group express itself on how individuals feel.

The questions given as suggestions here are only rough outlines -- you will have to phrase the questions more specifically and if possible let the group raise them.

- You will note that only about half of these scenarios actually need to involve physical action. Make sure that there is a good "mix" between talk and action in any single workshop.
- It does take experience to run a good workshop. Don't be discouraged if the first few don't work too well. Try to keep the situations as "close to home" as possible, and above all try to have workshops for participants in actions before the action takes place, even if they are not perfect.

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## SAMPLE SCENARIOS FOR ROLE-PLAYING

### I - The Eviction

A group of civil rights demonstrators is blocking access to a tenement to prevent a constable from evicting a tenant who has been participating in a rent strike. The constable and several citizens urge the group to obey the law and move out of the way; then the constable and a police officer threaten the group with arrest if it does not move. (You may want to continue this scenario to the point of actual arrest and being taken to the wagon.)

Questions: How do the demonstrators respond to the other citizens and to the constable? How do they respond to the officer?

Cast: Three or four demonstrators, two or three citizens, a constable, one or more police officers.

### II. The Congressman

Congressman Blank, a Negro representing a predominantly Negro district -- with a do-nothing record so far, and a reputation for being a "tool" of the local political machine -- is having a change of heart. He has even gone so far as to invite a group of civil rights people to his office in order to get their ideas. He has a group of his own advisers present. The Congressman, the civil rights people, and the Congressman's advisers, discuss the issue in a hard-headed, unsentimental way.

Questions: What will the relationship of the civil rights people be to the Congressman and his staff? How will the Congressman and his staff react to the ideas presented? What kind of information is needed in order to present a coherent case to the Congressman?

Cast: Congressman, two staff persons, three or four civil rights persons.

### III - The Barber Shop

A Negro civil rights demonstrator is attempting to integrate a barber shop. All other participants in the situation are whites: a barber, an assistant, two clients in the chairs, one client waiting, one police officer. All the whites are segregationists, but one of the whites in the chair is particularly rabid. The action begins when the other white is finished and gets up. It is the Negro's turn, but the head barber calls, "you're next" to the waiting white client.

Questions: What is the response of the Negro client? What kinds of actions and remarks raise and lower tensions? How does the segregationist really see the situation? What does he really feel? What are the real issues as far as he is concerned? As far as the civil rights demonstrator is concerned?

Cast: As listed above. You may add an additional onlooker (white) who sympathizes with the Negro and who intervenes at a later point in the action in order to show how this will affect the situation.

### IV - Magistrate's Court

A group of civil rights demonstrators has been arrested for "disturbing the peace" and "refusing to obey an officer" in a demonstration involving a school boycott. The action was peaceful picketing, but some of the demonstrators came in without training, and in fact did some calling out, jeering, and stepped onto school property. The officers had ordered them off the property, they had refused to get off, and had been arrested together with some of the "regulars" on the picket line. The scene is magistrate's court the next morning. The action begins when the magistrate asks, "Who is the complaining officer in this case?"

Questions: What is the relationship of the regular demonstrators to the undisciplined demonstrators? How should the defense be handled (assume that one of the "regulars" is an attorney)? What should the attitude of the group be towards the officer? Towards the magistrate? In case of conviction, what should the group's policy be? You may want to divide the scenario in half -- the course scene, and a discussion among the defendants as to policy.

Cast: Four "regular" demonstrators; two "undisciplined," newcomer demonstrators, a magistrate, a police officer, a court clerk or bailiff, several newsmen and other onlookers.

### V - Sit-In

Six demonstrators, including one white boy and one white girl, sit at a lunch counter in a southern community in an effort to secure service. A white waitress does not serve them. Two white troublemakers come and harass the demonstrators. A policeman stands by but does not interfere. There are some other people at the counters. The action begins when the demonstrators take their seats.

Questions: What is the effect of refusal of service upon the demonstrators? What is the effect of heavy harassment? How do the demonstrators see the situation? What of the effects on the onlookers?

Cast: Six demonstrators, white waitress, troublemakers, police officer, two or three other customers, all white.

VI - The Cell

A white civil rights demonstrator has just been arrested in a southern civil rights demonstration. Since the jail is segregated, he is lodged in a cell with three other white men, all of whom are ardent segregationists. The segregationists are sitting on the two bottom bunks, and one has his feet on the only chair in the place. Action begins when a police officer, with appropriate remarks, pushes the demonstrator into the cell.

Questions: How do you communicate your ideas in a hostile environment, and still survive? What kinds of techniques might be developed to help in this situation?

Cast: Police officer, white demonstrator, three other white men.

VII - Committee Meeting

A meeting of local civil rights organization's emergency executive committee is taking place to discuss what appears to have been the murder of a Negro citizen on the way to the police station in a police car. One member of the committee has been in touch with the local ACLU chapter and has an approximate idea of what happened, but the others have chiefly rumors. There is considerable community sentiment to take action. Another community civil rights group has already announced a march on city hall, and it is known that some of the marchers will be armed and that the march will be without any real discipline. One member of the committee is solidly in sympathy with this tactic already. The problem is to work out a tactic for the whole group.

Questions: What should the group do about the other civil rights group, if anything? What should the group's attitude towards the potential for community violence be? What kinds of tactics can the group effectively undertake?

Cast: Five persons integrated. One of these is informed on what actually happened. Another has already made up his mind on what tactic to follow. One person is chairman.

VIII - The Picket Line

Any group up to about 25 may participate in this. The instructor picks an issue and a situation, gives instructions for the group to walk an elongated circle, a few feet apart. It is helpful to have signs. Picket captains are assigned for each end of the line. An information officer is assigned; and a captain-in-charge is assigned. A variety of situations may be explored:

- 1 - harassment by segregationists, including roughing up, taking signs away, name-calling
- 2 - questions from passers-by
- 3 - volunteer unknown to the group arrives to join the line

- 4 - drunk passes the group and makes remarks
- 5 - persons from other integrationist groups not committed to nonviolence arrive with their signs
- 6 - harassment from police officers, including ordering the group across the street in violation of civil liberties
- 7 - newspapermen attempt to question pickets
- 8 - single picket becomes ill, or becomes violent. (Instructor may "plant" a person in the group.)

Questions: How are decisions made on-the-spot? How are decisions communicated to the group? How are public relations maintained?

#### LX - The March

This is a situation involving only four persons and demonstrating the problem of decision-making on-the-spot. One of the participants is told he is in charge of a mass march on City Hall; at a mass meeting the night before it was democratically decided, for various reasons, not to have any signs of any kind in the march. The march is about to "take off" when three persons appear, in succession, with signs. They are not connected to each other. The first person is privately instructed to be very stubborn and noncooperative about putting his sign away; the second is cooperative; the third is neutral. The first ~~two~~ were at the meeting the night before; the third was not. Action begins when the first person approaches the march marshall, and the marshall says, "Last night we agreed on no signs, right?" (He poses the same question to each of the others.) The instructor stops the action after the marshall has somehow come to grips with the stubborn individual, then the next person appears. In the course of the discussion with the third individual, the instructor calls out, "They're ready to go," referring to the march. It is important that the marshall not know in advance what the reaction of the three persons will be.

Questions: How do the marshall's feelings about the situation change as the pressure builds up? How much should the marshall try to placate the individuals, and how firm should he be? How does time affect the situation?

Cast: Marshall, three persons with signs.

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