

*Nonviolence Works Against the Nazis?**Nonviolence Works Against the Nazis?*

Could unarmed nonviolent resistance succeed against any brutally ruthless opponent in today's world? Indeed it can, and this essay aims to explain how this seeming impossibility is in fact the case by taking a look at nonviolent resistance to the Nazis. Success is defined here as any single instance of nonviolent resistance that is effective at meeting its stated goals. Any method used will fail at times, so we aren't restricting our view of the success of nonviolence based on single instances of failure. First this essay will discuss an instance of such resistance against the Nazis in Germany, and then it will discuss some of the dynamics at play in such situations by exploring a few other examples and tying those dynamics back to the German example.

The specific instance of nonviolent resistance to the Nazis in Germany that I'll look at and tie the rest of my discussion back to is the Rosenstrasse protest in the heart of Berlin in 1943 (Stoltzfus, 1996, p. xviii). It is worth noting that this wasn't the only instance of nonviolent resistance in Germany, it is just the only one I've chosen to focus on. What happened outside the Jewish Community's administrative building at Rosenstrasse 2-4 where the SS held Jewish men during the Final Roundup is that Aryan (in this context, perfect Germans, at least according to Hitler) wives of these men gathered in mass just outside the building until their husbands were released. At any time the Gestapo could have dispersed these women, but never did. Why not? That is what has to be discussed, and my discussion will point to why nonviolence works even against brutally ruthless opponents of today.

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To understand why the Rosenstrasse protest by these Aryan wives succeeded in getting their husbands released, it is crucial to understand how both Hitler/the Nazis and the resistance exercised power. Hitler exercised power by dehumanizing the Jews and keeping the entire population in fear. Further he was able to get the German government to legitimize his power, and some Germans willingly cooperated with the Nazis. Hitler also exercised power simply by nature of slowly building up these horrendous laws so that people hardly realized what was happening. By the time the Final Roundup came along, it simply felt like a natural extension of previous laws.

The Aryan resisters exercised power a few different ways. The strength and power of their resistance came from their love for their Jewish husbands (hence, quite literally, resistance of the heart) and their growing numbers of steadfastly nonviolent resisters outside Rosenstrasse 2-4. By the very nature of being Aryan these women exercised power since they were whom the Nazis wanted to please instead of alienate. Shooting at these Aryan women, therefore, would be something the Nazis don't want to do, as it would reflect badly on this goal of theirs to please Aryans. Each individual wife or daughter came on their own, but the force of their similar goals combined as one goal gave the resisters, as a whole, power.

Finally, a few specific factors that contributed to the Rosenstrasse protest success at releasing the Jewish husbands (even those already sent to Auschwitz) are the following. The protest occurred later in the war (in 1943), when some doubt about the legitimacy of the Nazis was beginning to dawn given

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that knowledge of the death camps was spreading. The protest may not have been successful earlier in the war when more Germans accepted Nazi rule. The relationship of Jewish husband and Aryan wife was a definite factor. This relationship was as genuine as any marriage within a single race, in reality both partners loved each other like they would any Jew or Aryan spouse. This evidence of their love was strengthened by the public act of refusing the simple divorce that was offered them by the Nazi government. The Rosenstrasse 2-4 building was only two blocks from the Gestapo HQ, a distance which suggests that the wives and daughters could have easily been dispersed; yet they weren't ever mowed down. The Nazis' increasing lack of action, which became ever more obvious, led to emboldening the protesters would lead to Aryans protesting, and chants of the protestors keeping their spirits up. That the Rosenstrasse protest occurred in the heart of Berlin meant it gained central attention, and became an icon of resistance to the Nazis, a symbol of hope for Aryans against Hitler, who had no means or will to violently resist. This was a public protest by a cohesive group of women that grew in size and persisted. As the women were unarmed the SS men had no reason to actually shoot at them (even though they acted like they were about to, more than once), which is a sign of their humanity even while under Nazi command.

Rosenstrasse is one example of such resistance working against a brutally ruthless opponent, I'll now turn to describing some specific dynamics that are at play in the nonviolent resistance against the Nazis on a broader scale. I'll be using some examples from outside of Germany in this section, but will always

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try and tie the dynamic described back to the Rosenstrasse action. These dynamics are much more tied to general nonviolence theory than any specific situation, but they help to illustrate how nonviolence works against any brutally ruthless opponent of today.

Particularly of interest is what Gandhi says regarding the intentionality of nonviolence by Jews, something we can apply to the Rosenstrasse protest. Gandhi emphasizes that nonviolence cannot truly be nonviolence if those who practice it come upon the use of it by accident. Therefore, he'd argue, the Aryans of Rosenstrasse didn't actually use true nonviolence. This observation ties into Gandhi's overall conclusion that this protest was an accident, so how can we ever reproduce it even under similar circumstances? The Rosenstrasse protest was accidental largely because there was no time for strategy, given the timing of when different stages of anti-Jew laws went into place. Average Aryans living day-to-day (be they in intermarriages or not) didn't realize what each additional law meant, or what the whole complex of laws added up to. By the time the Aryans began to see what was happening the genocide was already underway. They could only deal with individual instances and not strategize against the whole.

Another component of nonviolence theory to discuss in relation to Rosenstrasse is the theory that Gene Sharp describes. Remember that the group of Aryans, some of who were the women protesting, were the perfect Germans in Hitler's view. Therefore by nature of protesting they took away some of the popular support Hitler relied on, as Gene Sharp would state, they took away a

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pillar of the Nazi regime's power. After all, the whole reason that the atrocities carried out by the Nazis took as long as they did to become visible was because Hitler wanted to maintain his popularity so as to stay in power.

There are a few other dynamics worth discussing and illustrating with additional examples. These should help to generalize how this worked with the Nazis back to any brutally ruthless opponent of today.

The first two dynamics are that of legitimacy and complexity. The moment an occupying force loses legitimacy in the minds of those it seeks to occupy, it will see civilian resistance building quite quickly. Once the resistance gains a network for distributing materials they can quickly resist the occupier. In Denmark (a country whose resources the German army depended upon), for example, the workforce began utilizing inertia force tactics (Semelin, 1993, p. 38). These tactics had workers intentionally working well below their normal speed or quality to thwart production for the Germans. A complexity factor for resistance is the connection between government resistance and civilian resistance. First the government needs to not cooperate with the occupier, and then a civilian resistance can form.

Let us next discuss social cohesion, "the relative solidity of ties that bind individuals and groups" (Semelin, 1993, p. 64). Countries with a high level of social cohesion are more likely to resist occupation. Norway is an example of a country with high social cohesion. After churches and schools stood together against the occupation, the population followed. All the church leaders broke ties with the government in order to gain recognition with the resistance (Semelin,

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1993, p. 67). The laws of reactivity organize three stages of how resistance forms with social cohesion. These stages are spontaneous (really all that occurred at Rosenstrasse), organized, and finally unified (Semelin, 1993, p. 84). It was the underground press that led the population from one stage to the next. Germany had low social cohesion, and that is one thing that made the Rosenstrasse protest more accidental.

Public opinion plays a role in resistance movements, though it was absent from influence at Rosenstrasse. Public opinion can be either calm or agitated. The political party in the lead will have the public opinion influence over the population. Therefore public opinion may not actually be the thinking of the public, but rather that of the political leaders, and is therefore a state of mind. Though, if the population wants to resist, yet public opinion is of collaboration, the resistance will fail. Why, because the needed supports for resistance are absent if public opinion is for collaboration. The three channels of public opinion are statements by moral authorities, writing by opposition, and public protesting. Each channel has its own uses. Statements by moral authorities are usually statements by political leaders laying out the public opinion as they see it, this is one way they can try to enforce national views on issues. Writing by opposition is usually statements by leaders of resistance movements aimed at countering the official national public opinion. Lastly, public protesting allows a wide range of actions to be taken up by large numbers of resisters to show that the public opinion really isn't what the public thinks. There are also three circles of social

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mobilization: active complicity, passive complicity, and institutional resistance.

These are the environments in which the above channels can operate.

With our discussion of the Rosenstrasse nonviolent protest we laid out the ways in which nonviolent means were used against Hitler and the Nazis. Though seemingly unheard of and fatal, such situations of nonviolent means did succeed. We then took a look at the nonviolence theories and writings that both discuss the Rosenstrasse protest and expand the implications of Rosenstrasse further than Berlin in 1943 to other World War II-era examples like Norway and Denmark. We can see how this method can be used against any modern-day brutally ruthless opponent by understanding the dynamics discussed above. Though violence with deadly weapons may appear to be your only option against these opponents, nonviolence can be a means that will complicate your opponent's ability to respond with force.

References

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