

# PACIFISM AS PATHOLOGY:

Excerpts from *Pacifism as Pathology: Notes on an American Pseudo-Praxis*, an excellent article by Ward Churchill, published in *Issues of Radical Therapy* (journal) vol. XII, #s 1&2. If you can't find this article, write to L.W.O.D. send a buck or two for postage and copying & we'll send it.

## Peacekeepers

In numerous demonstrations of the past it has been found that the effectiveness and nonviolence of the action has been greatly enhanced by the participation of people with special skills. These specialized participants, or peacekeepers, perform specific facilitating roles for the action. Even if you have not decided to specialize in the role of peacekeeper, however, you may find yourself in a conflict situation in which nonviolent action everyone is, to some extent, a peacekeeper.

4. Maintain the internal self-discipline of the action. Peacekeepers facilitate the movement and directing traffic, encouraging people to walk and not run and providing information to the group. Peacekeepers are also prepared to handle conflicts among demonstrators.

5. Act as mediators between authorities and demonstrators. It may be important to have people as buffers between law enforcement officials, workers, and demonstrators. Peacekeepers help to maintain the nonviolent self-discipline of the demonstration and act as mediators in the confrontations between authorities and protesters. Peacekeepers have primary responsibility to the participants in the action, but they should be prepared to protect legal authorities, workers, and non-participants from demonstrators if necessary.

6. Be forgiving. Give up resentment over the wrong you are trying to set right. Gandhi said, "Hate sin, conflicts between demonstrators as well as to conflicts with police, workers, onlookers,..."

## Nonviolent Response to Personal Violence

Nonviolence focuses on communication:

Your objectives must be reasonable. You must believe you are fair and you must be able to communicate this to your opponent. Maintain as much eye contact as possible.

Make no abrupt gestures. Move slowly. When practical, tell your opponent what you are going to do before you do it. Don't say anything threatening, critical, or hostile.

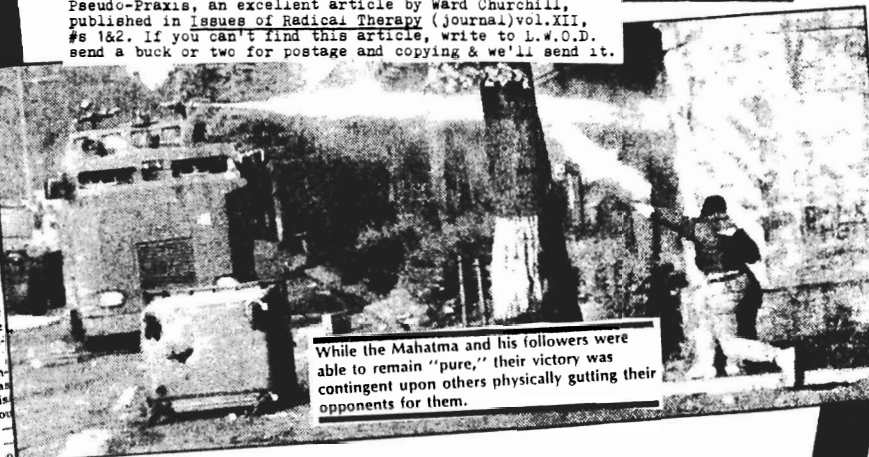
Don't be afraid of stating the obvious; say simply, "You're shouting at me," or "You're hurting my arm."

Someone in the process of committing an act of violence has strong expectations as to how his/her victim will behave. If you manage to behave differently in a nonthreatening manner, you can interrupt the flow of events that would have culminated in an act of violence. You must create a scenario new to your opponent.

Seek to befriend your opponent's better nature; even the most brutal and brutalized among us have some spark of decency which the nonviolent defender can reach.

Don't shut down in response to physical violence; you have to play it by ear. The best rule is to resist as firmly as you can without escalating the anger or the violence. Try varying approaches and keep trying to alter your opponent's picture of the situation.

Get your opponent talking and listen to what s/he says. Encourage him/her to talk about what s/he believes, wishes, fears. Don't argue but at the same time don't give the impression you agree with assertions that are cruel or immoral. The listening is more important than what you say — keep the talk going and keep it calm.



While the Mahatma and his followers were able to remain "pure," their victory was contingent upon others physically gutting their opponents for them.

### Profile of a Pathology

I just came home from Vietnam where I spent 12 months of my life trying to pacify the population. We couldn't do it, their resistance was amazing. And it was wrong, the process made me sick. So I came home to join the resistance in my own country, and find you guys have pacified yourselves. That too amazes me, that too makes me sick.

Vietnam Veteran  
Against the War  
1970



As with any pathology, pacifism may be said to exhibit a characteristic symptomatology by which it can be diagnosed. Salient examples of the complex of factors making up the pathology may be sketched as follows:

• Pacifism is delusional: This symptom is marked by a range of indicators, eg: insistence that reform or adjustment of given state policies constitutes a "revolutionary agenda," insistence that holding candlelit vigils and walking down the street constitute "acts of solidarity" with these engaged in armed struggle, or that — despite mere facts to the contrary — things such as "the nonviolent decolonization of India" or "the anti-war movement's forcing the Vietnam war to end" actually occurred.

At another level — and again despite clear facts to the contrary — insistence that certain tactics avoid "provoking violence" (when it is already massive) or that by remaining nonviolent pacifism can "morally compel" the state to respond in kind must be considered as deep seated and persistent delusions.

Finally, it must be pointed out that many supposed "deeply principled" adherents are systematically deluding themselves that they are really pacifistic at all. This facet of the symptom is marked by a consistent avoidance of personal physical risk, an over-weening attitude of personal superiority vis a vis those who "fail" to make overt professions of nonviolence, and sporadic lapses into rather un-pacifistic modes of conduct in interpersonal contexts (as opposed to relations with the state).

• Pacifism is suicidal: In its core impulse to prostrate itself before the obvious reality of the violence inherent to state power, pacifism not only invokes Emiliano Zapata's famous dictum that "it is better to die on one's feet than to live on one's knees," it actually posits the proposition that it is best to die on the latter and seeks to achieve this result as a matter of principle.

Pacifism possesses a sublime arrogance in its implicit assumption that its adherence somehow holds the ability to dictate the terms of struggle in any contestation with the state.

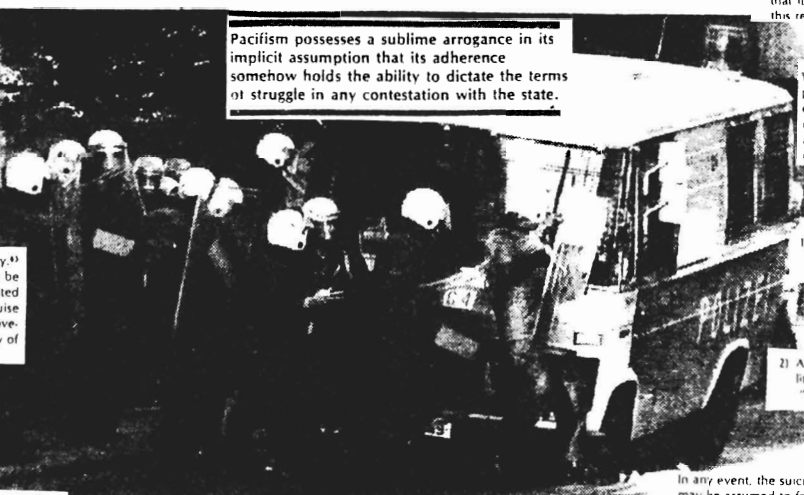
While it seems certain that at least a portion of pacifism's propensity toward suicide is born of the earlier mentioned delusion that it can impell nonviolence on the part of the state (and is therefore simply erroneous), there is a likelihood that one of two other factors is at work in many cases:

- 1) A sublimated deathwish manifesting itself in a rather commonly remarked "gambler's nervous" (ie. "Can I risk everything and win?").
- 2) A desublimated deathwish manifesting itself in a "political" equivalent of walking out in front of a bus (ie. "Will it hit me or not?").

• Pacifism is racist: In displacing massive state violence onto people of color both outside and inside the mother country, rather than absorbing any real measure of it themselves (even when their physical intervention might undercut some of the state's ability to inflict violence on nonwhites), pacifism can only be viewed as being objectively racist.

Racism itself has been accurately defined as a pathology.<sup>10</sup> Within the context of pacifism, the basic strain must be considered as complicated by an extremely convoluted process of victim-blaming passing itself under the guise of "anti-racism" (a matter linking back to the above-mentioned delusional characteristics of the pathology of pacifism).

Finally, both displacement of violence and victim-blaming intertwine in their establishment of a comfort zone for whites who utilize it (perhaps entirely subconsciously) as a basis for "prefiguring" a complex of future "revolutionary" social relations which would serve to largely replicate the present privileged social position of whites, vis a vis nonwhites, as a cultural/intellectual "elite."



In any event, the suicidal characteristic of the pathology may be assumed to follow the contours of other suicide impulses, centering on repressed guilt neuroses and associated feelings of personal inadequacy (in all probability linked to the above-mentioned subliminal racism) and severely complicated by a delusional insistence that the deathwish itself constitutes a "pro-life" impetus.<sup>11</sup> It is interesting to note that the latter claim has been advanced relative to European Jews during the 1940s.

From even this scanty profile, it is easy enough to discern that pacifism — far from being a praxis adequate to impell a revolutionary change — assumes the configuration of a pathological illness when advanced as a political methodology. Given its deep seated, superficially self-serving and socially approved nature, it is likely to be an exceedingly difficult pathology to treat and a long-term barrier to the formation of revolutionary consciousness/action in the United States.

<sup>10</sup>The use of this term is not intended to connote association with the double-speak currently employed by anti-abortion propagandists.