

What Would a Nonviolent Society Look Like?

by Glen Anderson

We spend a lot of our time protesting against problems but not enough envisioning and creating solutions. **Let's take a few minutes to reflect on what nonviolence is – and imagine what a non-violent society would look like.**

Our society blindly accepts militarism, the widespread but mistaken ideology that massive organized violence is an acceptable way to solve problems. But nonviolence is much more profound than the mere absence of war.

Violence is based on cynical assumptions, but nonviolence affirms ethical and humane values.

Our culture assumes that one individual or one nation should be #1 at someone else's expense. But nonviolence affirms all people as one human family. Nonviolence says "no" to whatever hurts people and "yes" to creative alternatives that help.

Our culture – including the history taught in our schools and the images we see on movie and video screens – teaches violence as the way to resolve conflicts. But nonviolence recognizes the inherent human value of every person – no matter who they are or what they do. When a conflict occurs, nonviolence seeks to listen deeply, understand how each person is hurting, discover what each one needs for fulfillment, and devise a workable solution. Nonviolence recognizes that each person holds a piece of the truth, so it seeks a higher truth than each person might know at the outset.

Violence imposes a solution that backfires in the long run, because a violent "quick fix" short-

circuits the process of solving the underlying problem. Nonviolence seeks genuine solutions, so nonviolence requires the self-discipline to use only those means that are consistent with our ends. Practicing nonviolence requires persistence and courage.

So what would a nonviolent society look like? How might the various levels of government devise public policies that are actually nonviolent?

What would a nonviolent foreign policy look like? It would seek the well-being of every nation and every person on the planet. It would promote peace and human rights for everyone. It would absolutely renounce war and military threats. It would eliminate weapons and the military itself, but it could develop and maintain civilian-directed infrastructure (people, transportation, emergency supplies, etc.) to provide relief from natural disasters and provide trained nonviolent peacekeepers to help in areas of conflict. It would practice diplomacy that would actually be worthy of the name – facilitating the resolution of conflicts in a helpful way, like the local Dispute Resolution Center does.

What would a nonviolent economic system look like? It would focus on meeting ordinary people's actual needs, rather than tempting them to overspend and diverting their money into profits for a wealthy elite. It would allow for small-scale initiative and prevent the accumulation of wealth into the hands of giant corporations. It would distribute goods and services equitably so everybody had enough and nobody had too much. It would provide well-paid jobs that are meaningful, satisfying and socially useful. It would provide for everybody's basic needs, including those who are not physically or mentally able to work. If someone has difficulties, a nonviolent society would respond with compassion and rehabilitation, rather than with neglect, contempt or blame. It would respect the natural world and use resources sparingly – sustain-

ably – so future generations would be able to meet their needs too.

What would a nonviolent justice system look like? It would actually guarantee even-handed justice, not a double standard for the rich vs. the poor or for the politically powerful vs. powerless. It would allow ordinary people to use the law to protect their rights and not be steamrolled by giant corporations or other special interests. A nonviolent judicial system would scrap our adversarial system – which is manipulated and skewed in favor of whoever could afford the most powerful lawyers – and replace it with judicial processes designed to actually seek the truth and produce wise justice. If someone broke the law, a nonviolent justice system would recognize this as brokenness within the community, so it would heal both the victim and the offender, and would find ways to rehabilitate and restore the offender to become a valued and productive member of the community again.

This is only a start. Wouldn't it be fun to take some time – either alone or with other people – to imagine how other sectors of our society would function if they were rooted in nonviolence?

How wonderful it would be to live in the non-violent society the FOR has been working toward for more than 90 years! **The national FOR's Vision Statement expresses that new society well:**

We envision a world of justice, peace, and freedom. It is a revolutionary vision of a beloved community where differences are respected, conflicts are addressed nonviolently, oppressive structures are dismantled, and where people live in harmony with the earth, nurtured by diverse spiritual traditions that foster compassion, solidarity, and reconciliation.