

# 'Power and Struggle' a journey through the history of protests

"The degree of liberty or tyranny in any government is, in large part, a reflection of the relative determination of the population to be free and their willingness and ability to resist efforts to enslave them."

So writes Gene Sharp in his timely new book, "Sharp's Dictionary of Power and Struggle: Language of Civil Resistance in Conflicts."

As you watch news coverage of various protests and rallies across this country – and there have been a growing number of them over the past year – have you ever wondered what motivates people to engage in these kinds of activities? More specifically, have you ever thought about what constitutes "Civil Disobedience" or who, exactly, is "The Establishment"?

Well, by the time you finish this thought-provoking and highly engaging book, you'll know precisely what these terms mean, together with an understanding of why they are so important to an increasing number of our nation's citizens.

Sharp is the founder of the Albert Einstein Institution and professor emeritus of political science at the University of Massachusetts/Dartmouth. His previous books, which have been translated into more than 60 languages, include "Gandhi as a Political Strategist," "Waging Nonviolent Struggle: 20th Century Practice," and "21st Century Potential and Nonviolent Action: A Research Guide."

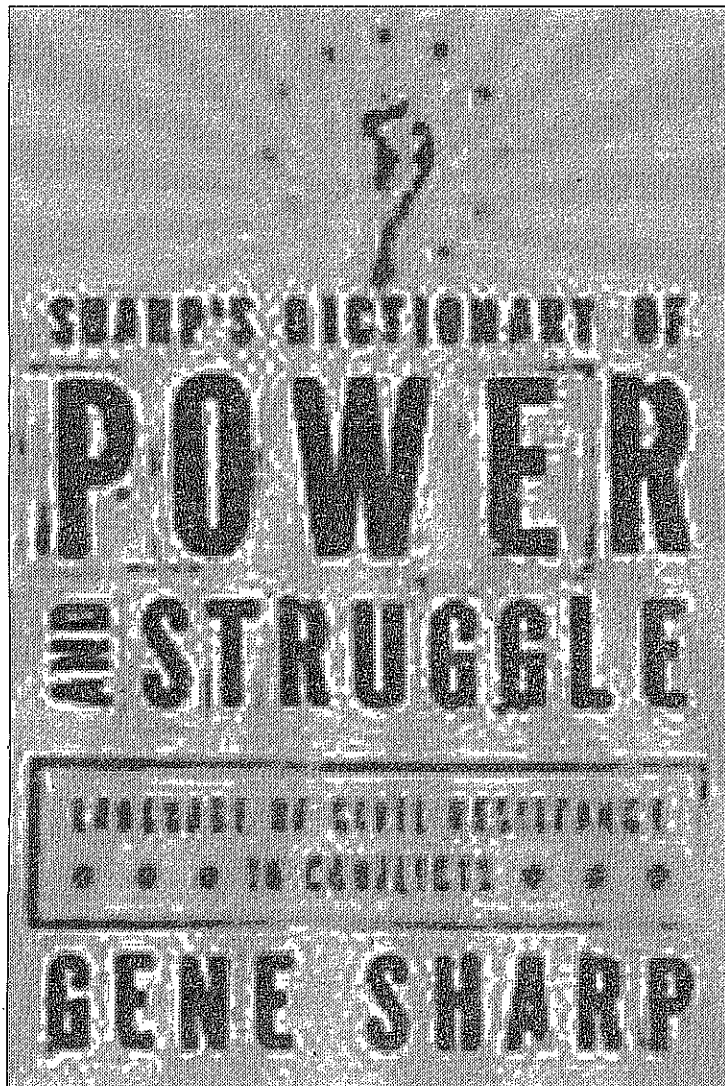
"Power and Struggle" is rather uniquely organized as compared to comparable books with a similar focus. The bulk of the text consists of a 261-page expanded dictionary in which Sharp explains key terms, concepts and historical events within the context of their relevance to social and political movements. A key strength of the book is its global scope.

As Sharp explains in the preface, "This dictionary arises from a decades-long endeavor to develop greater conceptual clarity for a vastly important phenomenon of social, economic, and political conflict: nonviolent action."

"Terminological confusion has long accompanied this aspect of domestic and international conflict," he adds.

Prior to the dictionary portion of the book, Sharp presents two relatively detailed portraits of recent social unrest. The first case study, "Serbia: 1996-2000," outlines the fall of Slobodan Milosevic, the Serbian and Yugoslav president who ruled the country from 1989 to 2000. Sharp's description of the events that lead to his eventual removal from office is both insightful and instructive.

"On Monday, October 2, the general strike began," Sharp writes in an effort to explain one of the key events in Milosevic's downfall. "It was the first attempt at a nationwide general strike in Serbia since World War II. The



"Sharp's Dictionary of Power and Struggle: Language of Civil Resistance in Conflicts" by Gene Sharp. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. 368 pages, \$19.95.

objective was to shut down roads and highways throughout the country, fortify the strikes at Kolubara and other key industries, and close schools and businesses."

"Milosevic responded with an appearance on nationwide television to denounce the actions of what he called the traitorous opposition," Sharp continues. "He accused the opposition leadership of working for foreign governments and NATO."

The second case study, "The Tunisian Uprising and Protests: December 2010 – January 2011," is a detailed chronology and analysis of what eventually came to be called the "Arab Spring."

"During President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's 23 years of rule, Tunisia was governed largely as a police state," Sharp writes. "His presidency ended abruptly in January 2011 after a nearly monthlong wave of expanding unrest forced him to leave Tunisia and seek exile in Saudi Arabia."

"Power and Struggle" concludes with "198 Methods of Nonviolent Action," which lists various strategies that have often been employed in campaigns to bring social, political and economic injustice into clear focus. Included are techniques such as writing letters of opposition or support, display of flags and symbolic colors, protest disrobing, renouncing honors, boycotts, sit-ins, and withdrawal from social

institutions. Individually, these actions often have minimal impact – collectively, they can exert a significant influence in the proverbial court of public opinion.

"Nonviolent struggles have played exceedingly important, but insufficiently recognized, roles in many historic and contemporary struggles," Sharp concludes. "Noncooperation and defiance by masses of people have produced undeniable major political results that previously were thought by some people to be impossible by nonviolent means."

By the way, Sharp defines "civil disobedience" as "a deliberate peaceful violation of particular laws, decrees, regulations, ordinances, military or police commands, or other orders. These are usually laws that are regarded as inherently immoral, unjust or tyrannical." Moreover, "the establishment" is "the complex of institutions and persons perceived as the effective 'powers that be' in controlling the society and political system."

"Power and Struggle" is an enlightening journey. But be forewarned, by the time you finish the last page, you may yourself be unable to resist the urge to march in solidarity with folks you used to watch with bewilderment on television.

— Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.