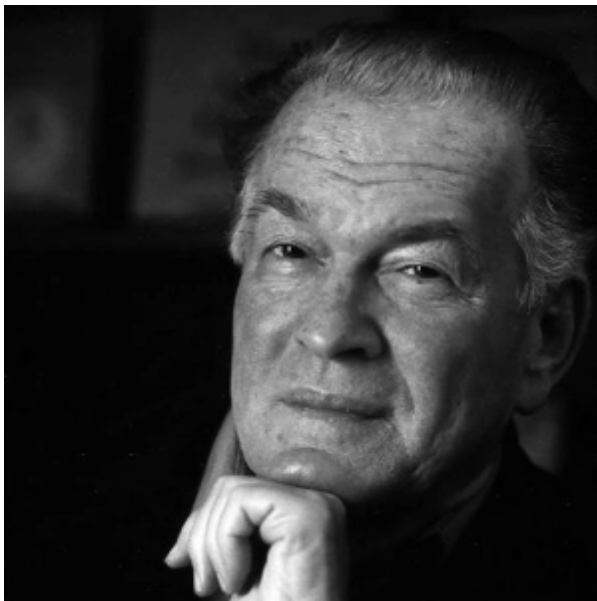


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Gene Sharp: From Berlin Wall to Arab Spring or The Politics of Counter-Revolution

27-34 minutes



Introduction



by Joaquin Flores

[Gene Sharp](#) is considered to be one of the chief tacticians of the US establishment's post-cold war period. As is understood by our readers, this period is signified by the US establishment's commitment to situating itself as the sole 'superpower'. Sharp's tactics are employed in the

broader strategy of developing an Atlanticist controlled uni-polar hegemonic power which is justified ideologically upon the 'Human Rights/Democracy' model of imperial or neo-colonial interventionism via Washington based or backed NGO's.

The author of the article below, Ernesto Mirelese, makes several substantial points about Sharp. Among them are Sharp's lack of academic scruples and an implicit charge of plagiarism from the Marxist schools. Sharp's employment by the CIA, and related organizations, are also described in greater detail.

Written only two months after the start of the 'Arab Spring', our readers will understand immediately the connection between the 'theories' of Gene Sharp (and his progenitor Saul Alinsky) and the Arab Spring 'tactic' as employed by the Atlanticist/NATO establishment based in Washington/New York, Berlin, Tel Aviv, and London.

Prior to the 'Arab Spring', this tactic was considered a quintessential component of the 'Color Revolution' phenomenon. Through the National Endowment for Democracy and other 'Washington Axis' NGO's, this tactic – and Sharp's work – was used to destroy Yugoslavia and was incarnated in the banally social-democratic (but anti-communist) 'Otpor!'

This tactic was arguably used for the first time as part of the formal unraveling of the DDR in 1989 and the USSR in 1991. Others have posited that the 'May of 68' events also share the same tactical heritage.



Berlin Wall, November 1989

As elaborated in the reproduced article below, one feature of Sharp's writing is in its manipulative use of vague and undefined terms such as 'Democracy', 'Dictatorship', and 'Freedom'. The tactic relies on a broader psychological operation (psy-op) of using mass media (and before this, Radio Free Europe, et al) to introduce these terms into popular consciousness as relating to 'the good'. While both academics and activists to this day have failed to concretely find consensus on the specific meaning and definition of the above undefined terms, the 'Sharp Tactic' cynically relies on the popularized meanings of them. The meanings become notional, inferred, memetic, and simplistic in the Orwellian sense.

Once the 'meme' of 'Freedom and Democracy' takes hold on the household level in the targeted nation-state or region as 'the good', participants are imbued with the sense of both mission and moral superiority in their activities. In a manner similar to the Al Qaeda model, some of the leadership with direct connections to Washington Axis are (at least partially) aware of the grander scheme,

while most organizers and activists believe that their party/network/organization and activities are home grown and not the product of imperial intrigue.

While Sharp clearly appropriates the fundamental Marxian framework of revolution, we urge our readers to be cautious in making the connection that Sharp is a crypto-Marxist, works towards 'Marxian goals', or his part of a broader 'Cultural Marxist' conspiracy as it is popularly understood. To wit, his primary work has been for the Atlanticist program, is himself a neo-liberal, and has aimed his work against ostensibly 'Marxist', socialist, resource nationalist, local hegemonic and anti-imperialist states and governments. To the extent that a 'Cultural Marxist' association could foreseeably be made with Sharp, the concept of 'Cultural Marxism' is derived from the Marxist [Antonio Gramsci](#)'s theory of 'the Hegemon'. Indeed, Sharp plagiarizes Gramsci in the same vain that he does so with Marx et al.



Antonio Gramsci

While strong evidence exists that elements of the Gramscian 'Cultural Marxism' are utilized by the Atlanticists

to wage a psy-op on ‘their own’ population (destruction of the nuclear family) in order to make them more submissive and pliable; and while Sharp is an Atlanticist agent who uses Gramscian/Marxian concepts; it is not our position that this is itself sufficient evidence of a broader ‘Marxist’ trajectory on the part of the ruling elite (class) of the Atlanticist or Washington Axis power. Rather we see this as evidence which supports our own views on syncretism: *theories are weapons in the hands of whomever wields them, and can be recombined in numerable manner to achieve desired results .*

With this in mind we present a reproduction of the following critique of the work and legacy of Gene Sharp, titled:

by [Ernesto Mirelese](#)

Dr. Gene Sharp is 83 years old and was born in North Baltimore, Ohio. Sharp never married or had children and according to an article in the 2007 November/ December issue of the Ohio State University Alumni Association Newsletter the healthy octogenarian lives and works out of his Boston, MA, home. This article is unique in that it provides details about Sharp’s private life not easily found.

In certain circles (mainly consisting of leaders who are not buying into the U.S. economic scheme) Sharp is a famous guy, renowned the world over as one of the leading guru’s of nonviolent resistance, he is a prolific writer on the subject of nonviolence starting with his 1951 masters thesis titled “Nonviolence: A Sociological Study” and 1968

doctoral dissertation titled “The Politics of Nonviolent Action: A Study in the Control of Political Power” He is currently the senior scholar at the Albert Einstein Institution which according to their website Sharp founded in 1983. The AEI website goes on saying, “The Albert Einstein Institution is dedicated to advancing the study and use of strategic nonviolent action in conflicts throughout the world. It is committed to the defense of freedom, democracy, and the reduction of political violence through the use of nonviolent action.”

The Wikipedia entry for AEI says Sharp spent time in prison as a conscientious objector during the Korean War but when examining both his curriculum vita and publication’s list (available for download at the AEI website) it seems unlikely since the Korean War ran from 1950 to 1953 which is exactly the time Sharp was finishing his Master’s thesis noted above. Surely a person of such renown around issues of nonviolence would include on his CV incarceration as a conscientious objection to a war as he is quite willing to share stories about his early experiences attempting to desegregate lunch counters in Ohio. His CV also does not mention his work with A.J. Muste, which the Wikipedia entry also mentioned.

Sharp has a long history at the Center for International Affairs according to his curriculum vita downloaded from the AEI website Sharp’s first research fellow position at the Center for International Affairs ran from 1965 to 1972. In 1965 Sharp began a portion of his career at the Center for

International Affairs (CIA) Harvard University where he has worked for over three decades alongside other foreign policy's notables such as Samuel P. Huntington and other past directors for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

The following excerpt was taken from the introduction of the anti insurgent classic "Counter Insurgency Warfare – Theory and Practice" written by David Galula under the auspices of the Center for International Affairs in 1966

“Created in 1958, the Center fosters advanced study of basic world problems by scholars from various disciplines and seniors officers from many countries. The research at the Center, focusing on the processes of change, includes studies of military-political issues, the modernizing processes in developing countries, and the evolving position of Europe. The research programs are supervised by Professors Robert R. Bowie (Director of the Center), Alex Inkeles, Henry A. Kissinger, Edward S. Mason, Thomas C. Schelling and Raymond Vernon.”

Each of these men with the exception of Raymond Vernon worked in or has an official affiliated the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Robert R. Bowie was the Deputy Director of the CIA from 1977 to 1979. Thomas C. Schelling also identified as working in the CIA served for a number of years on the board of the AEI. Finding information on Sharp is a task. It's almost like he doesn't exist. He is practically unknown in the English language press while certain leaders around the globe are very well versed with his work.

In the aforementioned Ohio State Alumni article Sharp is called the “most famous guy you’ve never heard of” This article makes two important points about Sharps work in that they give a sense of where Sharp has gone with his research. In spite of his impressive publications list this article which is obviously pro-Sharp points out, “Friendly critics lament that Sharp has not submitted his work—a massive collection of articles, arranged by topic—to rigorous academic testing... But Sharp believes in his ideas. He thinks he has developed a whole new theory of politics.” This point is probably the most startling of all. It is also a good clue as to why Sharp has stayed out of the cross hairs of other academics mostly because his ideas seemed to have been developed implemented and debated primarily within the arena of military tactics.

The very next paragraph sheds some interesting light on what is perhaps the most important point of all in dealing with Sharp’s theory of power. It is this theory or “new understanding” as Sharp puts it that supposedly helps us to understand how non violence can be used to effect political change. The author explains Sharp’s position on power:

The theory can be stated simply: Power, even in the most closed and brutal dictatorship, depends on consent. Ordinary people can band together to withdraw their consent. Movements succeed when they refuse to resort to violence, since the regime always possesses superior instruments of violence. Ergo, the future of democracy and freedom depends on nonviolence.

His description of how society and particularly tyrants rule in society is taken directly from Gramsci's theory of Hegemony. According to Brian Martin who provides one of the few academic analysis of Sharps work, "Sharp defines political power, which is one type of social power, as the "totality of means, influences, and pressures – including authority, rewards, and sanctions – available for use to achieve the objectives of the power-holder, especially the institutions of government, the State, and groups opposing either of them." So obedience and belief is key to how power works in society. It is obedience to the power structure, Martin's analysis of Sharps theory of power goes on to say about why men obey their rulers "that there is no single answer, but that important are habit, fear of sanctions, moral obligation self-interest, psychological identification with the ruler, zones of indifference and absence of self confidence among subjects."

Throughout his career Sharp has avoided serious academic scrutiny. He has no articles published with in academic journals and rarely cites within his own work. Even in the above mentioned article by Martin (1989), which is one of the few available that specifically offers an analysis of Sharp's theories the author writes in the opening paragraphs that his "analysis is done in the spirit of sympathetic criticism." This friendly analysis does not, however, keep Martin from pointing out the obvious Marxist progenitors of Sharps "original" theories. Martin though does point out "It is not by chance that Sharp regularly refers to Stalinism and Nazism. His examples of challenges

to authority largely concern situations which are widely perceived as oppressive by contemporary Western political judgment.”

The heart of Sharp’s argument is that power is taken. It cannot and will not be given or handed over in fact cannot be, but that only through a decisive, planned, structured and boldly implemented strategy of action people can take control of their situation and break the tyranny of dictators. Sharp’s close associate Col. Robert Helvey describes his first encounter with Sharp this way in the forward to Helvey’s book titled “On Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: Thinking about the Fundamentals” published by the AEI in 2004,

“While I was attending Harvard University as an US Army Senior Fellow at the Center for International Affairs in 1987-88, toward the end of my thirty year career as a US Army Infantry Officer, I met Dr. Sharp during a meeting of the Program for Nonviolent Sanctions. He introduced his subject with the words: “Strategic nonviolent struggle is about seizing political power or denying it to others. It is not about pacifism, moral or religious beliefs.”

The premise of Sharp’s work the taking of political power and the promotion of nonviolence as the main strategy of struggle are for the AEI clearly not based on a morality of nonviolence. This is an interesting position since it is quite clear that the AEI uses the image of Gandhi and other leaders of nonviolent movements in the 20th century to front the organization’s ideological image.

Sharp is a reformist, a liberalist who seeks to uphold the rule of law by conducting change within a society as lawfully as possible. The mission statement of the AEI makes this clear when it states a part of the mission is to “defend democratic freedoms and institutions,” and ever increasingly curious position for those who claims to be against state repression. With the constant enmeshing of capitalism and democracy the economic oppression of much of the worlds population and the use of Law/Force /Violence to uphold those “democratic freedoms and institutions” as if they can only be granted this way, is another chink the armor of non violence theory propagated by Sharp and others.

For purposes of this discussion we will look at the most widely translated and distributed piece produced by the AEI, “From Dictatorship To Democracy – A Conceptual Framework of Liberation.” During this examination a consideration of the organizing methodology and discussion of power in terms of the ability of organized and motivated elements of civil society within a given country to face and overthrow a dictatorship without the use of violence or military force.

This booklet contains some very good general advice for organizing a revolution or coup. Sharp is clear that the advice is purposely general. He starts from a very simple premise. Dictatorships are bad. People should overthrow them and replace them with democracies, because democracy is good for business. However, while there may be a general agreement that dictatorships are bad, even

though it must be pointed out that Sharp does not go into great detail about how to identify a dictatorship. Ideological agreements about the nature of may be a little harder to come by. Sharp also seems very careful to limit his criticism and identifications of dictators to communists and his criticisms of colonialism especially colonial powers are as non-existent as his class analysis. It is little wonder Gene Sharp is more famous in the 30 other languages than English.

His most widely discussed book was not written to be scrutinized academically. It is an organizing manual with cold hard advice about the mobilization of the masses in any given society. The author's claim as to how he arrived at his conclusions is questionable but the advice on how to arrive at his stated goals appears sound. So the crux of any criticism levied at Sharp and his work cannot necessarily be about the organizing methodology. Questions for him should center on the misrepresentation of this theories as original to himself and this colleagues.

In analyzing Sharp's booklet, first published in "Bangkok in 1993 by the Committee for the Restoration of Democracy in Burma in association with Khit Pyaing (The New Era Journal)" that is considered by most to be and eighty eight page distillation of his most important work the conclusion anyone must come to is that by his own words he has discovered new theories of power centering on obedience and consent. Sharp uses the rhetoric of revolution to contextualize reform and in doing this he doesn't really break any new ground with practical organizational advice

but he does raise some provocative and troubling questions by challenging without any supporting documentation the historically documented success of armed struggle in overthrowing dictatorships since World War II. His theories of obedience appear straight out of Marxist theory; particularly that of Antonio Gramsci and his theories of power echo Foucault profoundly. Finally, even the organization of his revolutionary structure, his magnum opus submitted to millions across the globe is based deeply on Maoist methods and theories of guerrilla warfare and insurgency.

Careful consideration of these claims shows how difficult it is almost impossible to talk about social change or revolution without contextualizing it within a Marxist vocabulary. Why is this and what problems does it present for Sharp? Saul Alinsky in his seminal work “Rules for Radicals” lays out the ideological problem within the opening chapter, “The have-nots of the world, swept up in their present upheavals and desperately seeking revolutionary writings can find such literature only from the communists, both red and yellow. Here they can read about tactics, maneuvers, strategy and principles of action in the making of revolution.” Alinsky is pointed about the fact communism and communist theory was seen at the time as “synonymous with revolution”

The footnote below from Alinsky’s introduction is also important both to the work of Alinsky and Sharp as it help us to understand the anti communist milieu where these two made their careers. Certainly any contemporary of

Alinsky whom time has shown shares some similar passions in the field of organizing mass movements would be at the very least familiar with this book. The footnote is a quote from U.S. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas written for the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions Occasional Paper No. 116, and it sets for us and ideological stage of mental competition not so subtly present in the theoretical aspirations of Sharp. O' Douglas writes:

On trips to Asia I often asked men in there thirties and forties what they were reading when they were eighteen. They usually answered 'Karl Marx'; and when I asked them why, they replied, 'we were under colonial rule, seeking a way out. We wanted our independence. To get it we had to make revolution. The only books on revolution were published by the communists.' These men almost invariable had repudiated communism as a political cult, retaining, however, a tinge of socialism. As I talked with them, I came to realize the great opportunities we missed when we became preoccupied in fighting communism with bombs and with dollars, rather than with ideas of revolution, of freedom, of justice.

While it is impossible to say for sure that Sharp read Alinsky's book it is safe to say the likelihood is high. Capitalism may have triumphed in the minds of some but it is apparent that for many decades Communism as a critique of capitalism was the refuge of the oppressed. A stronghold of theory for the emancipation of humankind from economic slavery, how should that understanding

impact our view of Gene Sharp and the Albert Einstein Institution? Sharp is a theoretical ventriloquist. The dummy he uses to misdirect his audience with is his program of nonviolence that under certain desperate circumstances looks like revolution and with some help can talk, but will never walk on its own. It moves with the fingers and hand of Capitalist interest on the levers in its back. This is the curse of democracy, being to closely associate with capitalism until they have become in the minds of many synonymous.

The reality of Sharp's booklet when put into the cold hard light of the day is that dictatorships and democracies will have not have moral dilemmas, problems about eliminating the opposition (Chile and Guatemala are both excellent examples of the widespread use of violent repression by U.S. backed "democracy" movements). It would perhaps be interesting to see how Sharp's ideas about nonviolence could be applied to enact revolutionary change within the United States by and organized Xicano Movement.

How can the organizational and "political defiance" theories of Sharp and his military advisor Col. Robert Helvey broadcast by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) throughout the Second and Third World, and through its funding of the Albert Einstein Institution impact freedom struggles with the borders of this country or throughout the America's. Their attempted misdirection of nonviolent direct action away from the moral underpinnings of Tolstoy, Gandhi, King and Chavez have, within their Cold War paradigm of anti communism/pro capitalism,

attempted to remove the question of power, democracy and capitalism from the crucible of revolutionary struggle and in fact maybe attempting to redefine and question the very basis of force (Gewalt) in revolutionary theory and its legitimate application to oppression.

Political Defiance then, in Sharp's estimation, can only be effective as counter balance to what he calls the "centralizing effects of violent sanctions" He goes on here and through out the booklet boldly equating nonviolence with democracy by saying, "the use of the technique of nonviolent struggle contributes to democratizing the political society in several ways." The equation of nonviolence with democracy or democratic movements is a particularly troubling move on Sharp's part, because if nonviolence equals democracy then violence must equal communism or dictatorship, which in Sharp's lexicon are the same thing.

Understandable considering his age, association and intellectual collaboration with some of the worlds foremost anti communist thinkers at the Center for International Affairs. Troubling though since Sharp attempts to equate democracy with peace when in fact the violence of Marxism has been a reaction against both capitalist and democratic aggression on economic and military fronts. It is important to keep in mind Marxism as a theory is first and foremost a critique of and reaction to capitalism as an economic system, it stands to reason then any real world actions taken on the part of Marxists are expansions of that critique.

Taking these points into account it would seem a legitimate question for all to consider is the future of revolution. There is more at stake in this discussion than simply whether or not nonviolence is more effective than violence as a political solution to despotism, as if despotism could be universally defined. The real stake in this affair is the Marxist heritage of revolution. How will future generations understand change, revolution and communism? Who will be the interpreters of that legacy and its present day manifestations? As a function of Capitalist democracy limited to reform agreements between oppressed workers and industrialists or as an authentic discourse creating the vocabulary and the practices surrounding it can lay legitimate claim to real change. Since Sharp has chosen to couch his theories in the theories of Marxist liberationists it is equally important to examine his organizing methodology for similar roots.

To help frame the discussion around Sharp's methodological recommendations we must first look at his claims of originality in regards to his theory of action. Since it is clear that contrary to his contentions these are not new theories of power but in fact draws deeply from Marxist theory in determining not just how revolution should take place but how we as "democrats" should think and talk about it. To do this it is important to understand the foundation of change inherent in Marxist thought. Mao Tse-Tung writes,

Marxist philosophy holds that the most important problem does not lie in understanding the laws of the objective

world and this being able to explain it, but in applying the knowledge of these laws actively to change the world.

From the Marxist viewpoint, theory is important, and its importance is fully expressed in Lenin's statement, 'without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.' But Marxism emphasizes the importance of theory precisely and only because it can guide action. If we have a correct theory but merely prate about it, pigeonhole it and do not put it into practice, then that theory, however good, is of no significance.

The reason generations of freedom fighters have turned to Marxist theory for guidance in their efforts to overthrow colonialism is that Marxists make revolution. Sharp gives his opening four points in the beginning pages of this booklet he writes a short but familiar four point list of steps to a liberation struggle. These four points are,

One must strengthen the oppressed population themselves in their determination, self-confidence and resistance skills,
One must strengthen the independent social groups and institutions of the oppressed people,
One must create a powerful internal resistance force: and
One must develop a wise and grand strategic plan for liberation and implement it skillfully.

Just like his definitions of power and consent Sharp continues to draw directly from Marxist theory (specifically Maoist) in fashioning an organizing structure for nonviolent overthrow. The development of dual power structures or creating shadow governments for the purpose of

challenging the hegemony of the state is a well-documented and widespread practice. The basis of resistance in Sharp's writings is the withdrawal of consent (to be ruled) by the populace, "as the above discussion indicates, liberation from dictatorships ultimately depends on the people ability to liberate themselves." Taking a look at the writings of Mao Tse Tung brings home some of the evidence of this extensive plagiarism.

In Mao's essay "Political Mobilization for the War of Resistance" he puts forward four specific points for the political mobilization of the common people. The similarities between Sharp's main points written between 50 and 60 years after Mao continue to mount especially in light of the fact Sharp's allegedly original theories begin and end with the political mobilization of the people. Mao writes,

“What does political mobilization mean? First, means telling the army and the people about the political aim of the war. It is necessary for every soldier and civilian to see why the war must be fought and how it concerns him ... Secondly, it is not merely enough to explaining the aim to them; the steps and policies for its attainment must also be given...there must be a political programme ... Thirdly, how should we mobilize them? By word of mouth, by leaflets and bulletins, by newspapers, books and pamphlets, through plays and films, through schools, through mass organizations and through our cadres ... Fourthly, to mobilize is not enough ... we must link the political mobilization for the war with the developments in the war

and with the life of the soldiers and the people, and make it a continuous movement.”

Sharp has taken the heart of this statement – the political mobilization of the population and reconfigured it (without proper recognition) to end before hostilities erupt. His contention that political mobilization coupled with massive civil disobedience will bring oppressive governments to their knees is based on the experience, blood and victories of others who have fought this struggle with guns. The rest of the booklet is a not so subtle rehashing of basic guerrilla theory. The idea, “success is most often determined not by negotiating a settlement but through the wise use of the most appropriate and powerful means of resistance available” is a view point shaped by centuries of anti-colonial resistance and active physical opposition to the invasion of lands in Asia, Africa and the America’s by European powers and the formulation of a philosophy to combat that military oppression.

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