



made a very important and substantial contribution to scholarship on demonstrations and on the historiography of the Second International.

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**April Carter. *People Power and Political Change: Key Issues and Concepts*.** London and New York: Routledge, 2012.

The Philippines movement that brought down the dictatorial Ferdinand Marcos in 1986 has bestowed the name “people power” on non-violent struggles when politically significant numbers take action. This turning point was contemporaneous with national movements of the 1980s and 1990s that brought about peaceful transitions from Soviet rule and communist order in the Eastern bloc, beginning the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The Arab Awakening would set in motion a similar major upheaval. Now, from one of the world’s senior scholars on nonviolent direct action comes a remarkably succinct review of critical topics and questions involved in the rise of mass popular movements in opposition to undemocratic regimes, a subject that the author has been studying for more than half a century.

April Carter’s interest in nonviolent action began in 1957 when, as an activist in the British nuclear disarmament movement, she heard Gene Sharp lecture on Gandhi. In 1964, she was part of a small group of planners that organized a conference at Oxford, resulting in *Civilian Resistance as a National Defense: Nonviolent Action against Aggression*, edited by Adam Roberts, now head of the British Academy. Its treatment of nonviolent struggle, civilian defense, and nonviolent resistance to military occupation was the finest I could find, soon after my four years of working for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, at the heart of the U.S. civil rights movement. Building upon that life-changing experience as a practitioner and seeking to deepen my theoretical understanding of how we had fought for civil rights, the compilation was significant for me. Carter’s chapter, “Political Conditions for Civilian Defence” (in *Civilian Resistance as a National Defense*, 274–290), concerns the following, still salient questions: When are the political conditions ripe for successful nonviolent resistance campaigns? Under what conditions could a country abandon military force for nonviolent methods of national defense (civilian defense)?

Since becoming a lecturer in politics in the 1960s, Carter has written on the interaction between direct action and the pursuit of democracy, as evinced by her *Direct Action and Liberal Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973) and *Direct Action and Democracy Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005). Her latest book, *People Power and Political Change*, takes a rigorously comparative approach, swiftly and with admirable brevity (only 177 pages) considering the major questions raised by the sweep of massive civil resistance movements against undemocratic regimes, including the Arab Awakening. Carter made an apt choice for her title in using “people power” to cover national movements against political oppression, which is narrower in reference than civil resistance. Indeed “people power” may be the best tag for colloquial usage, with its simplicity in describing a method for social and political change that relies on no weaponry other than the human beings who are directly involved. The resistance movements under consideration understand this designation, seeing themselves as people rising to oppose oppressive rulers. The term links the idea of resistance to the aspiration and ideal of democracy which is the goal of such campaigns. This terminology reflects a particular concept of the political power that is at the core of the main strategy of such mass mobilizations: Namely, systems can be disintegrated when the ruled refuse their obedience. Journalists often prefer people power as a label, which sections of the general public comprehend.

Carter breaks new ground in comparing people power and peoples’ war, contrasting popular unarmed and armed resistance, especially long-term unarmed struggles. She notes a new development: “Most interestingly, a significant number of guerrilla movements have decided either to work with unarmed resistance movements or to experiment at least provisionally with a civil resistance campaign, or to recast their strategy as primarily one of unarmed rather than armed resistance” (45). Yet, she rebuts the notion that the rapid spread of successful people power might be interpreted as a trend toward less violent types of resistance. Not so, she says. Such an interpretation “is contradicted by the rise of a new form of guerrilla terrorism.... [that] suggests a conscious commitment to a Clausewitzian logic of total violence” (47). The book sets a precedent in contending that “it appears that in the twenty-first century there is a new realignment of forces. Genuine ‘people’s war’ has to a large degree lost its historic moment. The primary choices today are between

social movements and people power on the one hand and resorting to terror on the other" (24).

Considering people power and changing theories of revolution, Carter valuably recontextualizes the 1905 and 1917 Russian revolutions in evaluating the meaning of "revolution" for people power movements pressing for democracy. Reviewing arguments for and against Eastern Europe's 1980s–1990s mobilizations being considered as revolution, she notes the disappointment of commentators who say it should not be classified as revolution, while pointing out that "others welcomed a model of nonviolent revolution, linked to political moderation, and a willingness to compromise and negotiate where necessary" (176). In reinterpreting the role of violence in past revolutions—a highlight of the book—she proffers an alternative thesis: "in the process of creating a revolution, as opposed to later stages of consolidation, the 'force' of numbers (people power), often backed by popular organization, has tended to be more important than the extent of physical force or armed violence, which has in some cases been subsequently much exaggerated" (55). How "the people" should be defined is analytically explored.

Among the most alluring insights yielded by the past four decades' development of an enlarging literature on nonviolent struggle is an often-observed tendency for nonviolent movements to favor democratic outcomes, which has now been separately corroborated with empirical data. Carter's treatment of independence struggles in post-1950s decolonization in Africa is brief but lucid. Although granting some validity to interpretations for the rise of democratization as attributable to cultural or religious influences, she concludes that "the spread of people power demonstrates that people in all cultures who have bitter experience of arbitrary and repressive forms of government desire basic political rights and democratic choice" (175). Her grip on the history of nonviolent action touches virtually all continents and includes the transnational global movements of today. She considers the influence of people power on global politics and trends, including the expansion of international governmental organizations and international law, citizen networks operating beyond borders, and changes in media (Twitter and Wikileaks). Acknowledging the effectiveness of key instances of people power, Carter also delves into new forms of repression, potential political weaknesses, disintegration of empires, and the effects of power rivalries.

Studying the book, I kept thinking that perhaps I should discard my syllabi and instead use Carter's compact framework. It would comprise the basis for an excellent syllabus for an advanced graduate course of a semester or term, if not a full year. This is partly because when raising issues, the author refers us to dependable research, often by country specialists. In some cases, the book might be used with sophisticated upper-level undergraduate students of political science and international politics. Carter writes briskly, accessibly, and with relatively little jargon. This book is not for general readers or those initially contemplating the theory and practice of nonviolent action; nor is it for the first-time teacher of the subject. It assumes basic familiarity with the technique of nonviolent action as a historical phenomenon. The text proceeds not by chronology or key cases, which is why her emphasis on *issues* and *concepts* as the organizing basis is fresh. The book's structure offers conceptual handles for discussion in face-to-face teaching and would be particularly helpful for those using elicitive methods. The comprehensive bibliography allows readers to take advantage of a reliable scholar's ongoing engagement with major thinkers who have shaped theory, contemporary works, and her own study of real-world successes and failures of nonviolent action worldwide.

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