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Robin Newcome

Non-Violent Resolution in Today's World

Non-violent resolutions are used in modern times in many different arenas including politics, labor, and social issues. Non-violence involves using peaceful tactics for resolving issues and disputes, and for reducing escalation and violence. Some examples are strikes, sit-ins, marches, speeches, arbitration, and political activity. Non-violent resolution is a strategy, or tactic, for achieving specific goals. Today one movement that is at the forefront of utilizing non-violent resolution is the labor movement. Labor unions represent the workers and, through the power of collective bargaining, seek to negotiate with employers to better working conditions, incomes, and benefits. In the face of appalling conduct by employers, workers have risen up to defend themselves and demand fair and decent treatment. What's more, they have done this using non-violent tactics like strikes and collective bargaining to promote their causes and gain the treatment they deserve.

Labor unions must actively engage in assuring the well-being of the worker. The most effective way to do this is through non-violent activities. Historically violent labor disputes end in mass death and broken families. In 1914 a violent strike by workers at the same Colorado Fuel and Iron who recently resolved a strike peacefully resulted in the Ludlow Massacre. Three union workers, two strikers, two women and twelve children were killed in a skirmish between striking union workers and the National Guard, whom had been called in to calm the violence that had been mounting during the strike. The incident came after a fourteen month long dispute between the company and United Mine Workers of America. The Ludlow Massacre happened because company executives were only interested in maximizing company profits by spending as

little as possible on workers pay and working conditions. Incidents like these are not the solution to issues in today's world. People must respect one another to resolve disputes peacefully for the preservation of human life and workers rights.

Collective bargaining is the most powerful tool that unions use to fight for their rights as workers. This non-violent tactic uses the power of a group to negotiate with employers. Collective bargaining agreements generally have a three year life span. When this time period is running out, workers' representatives, usually from a labor union, approach the employer and attempt to negotiate a contract upon which both sides can agree. Typical issues covered in a labor contract are hours, wages, benefits, working conditions, and the rules of the workplace. To negotiate, union members either use their skills as bargaining tools, or they use sheer numbers and may go on strike. Once both sides have agreed upon terms of a contract, it is signed and kept in place for another three years. The agreement reflects the combined desires of all the employees, along with limitations that the employer wishes to see put in place. The result is a powerful document which usually reflects cooperative effort. The final contract is called a collective bargaining agreement, to reflect the fact that it is the result of a collective bargaining effort. For workers, collective bargaining is an excellent tool. Many workplaces benefit from unionization, which allows workers to speak together as a body to assert their rights. Employers also benefit from collective bargaining agreements, which set out clear expectations for both sides. The experience of collective bargaining can also be a learning experience for both sides of the discussion, as it encourages employers and employees alike to consider each other's positions. The ability of labor unions to encourage and employ this tactic demonstrates the power of non-violent

resolutions to better working conditions, and therefore, the lives of workers around the world.

If labor and management cannot come to an agreement, they can utilize another strategy for non-violent resolution by enlisting outside help, such as mediation. Labor mediation is a formal meeting or series of meetings set up to negotiate labor disputes. A mediator is a neutral person who can suggest solutions. A trained mediator agrees to hear both sides of a dispute objectively, but the main focus remains on the two parties as they work towards a mutually beneficial solution. During mediation proceedings, the mediator can render opinions on the best course of action, but ultimately both sides must sign off on a settlement agreement between themselves. The mediator's suggestions and decisions may be based on legal principles, but his opinions are not considered legally binding. If the original negotiations were unsuccessful, mediation is an excellent tool for promoting non-violent resolution.

If a company and a union fail to agree on a contract, negotiations may go to arbitration. It is conducted by an arbitrator, who will help bring labor and management to an agreement over wages, benefits, work conditions, or anything else. An arbitrator hears the evidence and hands down a decision that is legally binding on both sides. The arbitrator could be a retired or active judge, or a very experienced attorney. During arbitration, there are usually little if any out-of-court negotiations between parties. Contract arbitration can help decrease some of the legal costs and make re-negotiating contracts easier. Labor arbitrating processes can expedite the resolution, where other forms of legal resolution could take much longer, and affect productivity or even the functionality of a workplace. Binding arbitration involves both parties agreeing to accept

the ruling of the third-party or arbitration company. Arbitration is also a form of non-violent resolution.

Unions may use several methods to pursue their demands. They may engage in a slow down, in which workers deliberately reduce rates of production. Another form of non-violent resolution that is practiced by labor unions is the strike. A strike occurs when workers refuse to work en masse. They will picket, or stand outside of a place of business, creating a "picket line", and attempt to dissuade other workers from entering the place of business and working, or customers from entering. This technique of non-violence can draw public attention to the issue. A sit-down strike occurs when workers enter the place of business and refuse to do their jobs or leave. Most strikes are undertaken by labor unions during collective bargaining. Many contracts between unions and employers have non-strike clauses. The strike is reserved as a threat of last resort during negotiations between the company and the union, and may occur just before, or immediately after, the contract expires. Strikes are actually rare, as 98% of contract negotiations are settled without a strike. People who cross the picket line to work during a strike are called scabs. Lockouts involve a company refusing to let employees work until they accept the company's terms. One example of a strike was at the Colorado Fuel and Iron (now Evraz Rocky Mountain Steel Mills) in Pueblo Colorado, when the United Steel Workers Local 2102 began a strike in 1997 which was part of a dispute that lasted until 2004. A new labor agreement was signed in 2009 between Evraz Rocky Mountain Steel Mills and the United Steel Workers, which was a triumph considering the company's history with labor unions. This successful resolution

demonstrates the power and importance of non-violent resolution. Without using force, it is fully possible to affect important changes for workers.

Another non-violent tactic is the boycott, in which individuals refuse to buy or sell products from or to an individual, organization, or country. Labor unions use boycotts as a form of non-violent protest to gain better working conditions or to raise awareness to important causes or unfair laws. One famous example was the California grape and lettuce boycotts, led by the United Farm Workers, in the 1970s that led to the unionization of many California farm workers. This campaign, led by Cesar Chavez, used nonviolent tactics such as protest marches, strikes, and boycotts.

Other forms of non-violence labor unions practice includes letter writing, door-to-door flyers, assisting voters to the polls during elections, email campaigns, informational websites (ex: IBEW and AFL-CIO websites), rallies, and telephone campaigns. Labor unions also work to promote legislation favorable to the interests of their members or workers as a whole. They may pursue campaigns, undertake lobbying, or financially support individual candidates or parties for public office. In today's world, campaigns are conducted by door-to-door activities, speeches, and even through the internet.

Non-violent tactics have not always been used in resolving disputes between workers and employers. However, this has been to the detriment of everyone involved. The modern use of non-violent strategies has vastly improved the often brutal relations between employees and their employers. When unions utilize non-violence resolutions, it greatly improves the lives of workers, both in unions and not. They have avoided heart-wrenching violence and greatly improved workers rights, pay, benefits, and

working conditions. Non-violent resolution has the power to affect amazing changes in the world, and unions have indisputably proved this.

“Without a direct action expression of it, nonviolence, to my mind, is meaningless.” –

Mahatma Gandhi