Gene Sharp

Gene Sharp, born on January 21, 1928, is a democratic political scientist that explored dictatorships and its trend toward democracy. His ideas on the weaknesses of a dictatorship and the transition toward democracy can be summarized into three main topics: power, leadership, and violence.

Power

The "Monkey Master" fable tells a story of a man who depended upon his servant monkeys for food. As soon as the monkeys cooperated and realized that they could subsist without any reliance or benefits from the master, they abandoned the master, leaving him to starve to death. Without the obedience of the monkeys, the master had no power.

Power is dependent upon the consent of the governed or ruled. In Hobbes, citizens of the state had to all agree to the sovereign because of their own self-interest; it was better for everyone to submit to the protection that the sovereign offered. In Locke, everyone agreed to enter a social contract that dictated majority rule or rule of the general will. This is similar to what Sharp suggests as a requisite for a dictatorship. For a dictator to rule over those governed, the citizens must agree to the rule. Sharp takes a look at a few historical examples and pointed out that this is often not the case, correlating to a decline in dictatorships.

In a more direct sense, power in a dictatorship requires authority, human resources, material resources, and skills/knowledge. The dictator must have these means to run a state. Authority is necessary because it legitimates the regime, allowing for obedience. The dictatorship must also have the means to human and material resources; financial support, capital, and man power are all necessary in forming a state. "All of these sources, however, depend on acceptance of the regime, on the submission and obedience of the population..." (19).

Leadership

Sorel states that there must be a myth put forth by a leader to cause a revolution. The leader has to be inspiring for the myth to be successful in uniting a revolutionary group. However, Sharp argues that Sorel did not take into account the aftermath of such a type of revolution. This charismatic leader would then have the most power, thus returning to a prior state of dictatorship.

A bottom-up approach must be applied if the post-dictatorship state should be a state of democracy. Rather than one charismatic leader spearheading a revolution, a cooperative effort in a revolutionary group would turn out to be more effective in achieving democracy. There would be no hierarchical power structure among the revolutionary group. Each individual involved in the revolution will have an involvement and input into the formation of this new state.

A plan must be in place before the revolution and one component of this plan is a democratic constitution that would limit the power of government, which would preserve democracy. It is this united effort from all citizens that would help rebuild a civil society.

To begin with this cooperative effort, people must have the "ability to liberate themselves" (8). This demands that they cooperate as a force, strengthen each individual's self-confidence and determination, create a powerful internal resistance force, and develop a strategic plan.

Violence

"By placing confidence in violent means, one has chosen the very type of struggle with which the oppressors nearly always have superiority" (4).

The sovereign, or dictatorship, exclusively owns the right and authority to exercise violence. A violent struggle from democrats would only end up to be a failure because "the dictators almost always have superiority in military hardware, ammunition, transportation, and the size of military forces. Despite bravery, the democrats are (almost always) no match" (4). Sharp suggests alternative measures to tackle a dictatorship. None of them are violent.
"[Nonviolent] struggles is fought by psychological, social, economic, and political weapons applied by the population..." (30). Recall that the oppressor’s power is dependent on the obedience and submission of the population, and the institutions that come along with it. By severing these sources of power, political defiance will succeed in defeating a dictatorship. The people can withdraw its human resources, its capital, its submission to the state, and its consent to be governed to cut off the power that they feed into the dictatorship. This sort of political defiance works better than violence as violence is a means and weapon that the state itself not only owns but has a monopoly on.