

A presentation to ICNC's Academic Webinar Series, Oct 27, 2010 by Dr. Stellan Vinthagen, Associate Prof. of Sociology

# **HOW CAN MOVEMENT AND REVOLUTION STUDIES INFORM THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF NONVIOLENT ACTION?**

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# ABSTRACT

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The starting point is that real world events and statistics show how civil resistance or nonviolent action movements, contrary to conventional assumptions, are very effective means to change societies.

Several authoritarian regimes have fallen (e.g. Apartheid South Africa or Milosevic's Serbia) after popular, relatively peaceful rebellions.

Recent quantitative research reports have shown a great effectiveness of civil resistance campaigns (Karatnycky & Ackerman 2005; Stephan & Chenoweth 2008).

# ABSTRACT (II)

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At the same time there are several conflicts in which civil resistance has yet to be successful, e.g. in Palestine/Israel, Tibet/China, Colombia or Western Sahara/Morocco.

And we also see how some “nonviolent revolutions” are having serious democracy problems (e.g. Georgia or Kyrgyzstan).

# ABSTRACT (III)

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- ✘ There are reasons to reflect on the role of various conditions and contexts when applying resistance strategies. Here nonviolent action studies have something to learn from other, more advanced, social science areas, e.g. social movement studies or revolution studies.

# ABSTRACT (IV)

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- ✘ This presentation tries to inspire and illustrate possible improvements of civil resistance strategies. What happens when we apply e.g. political opportunity theory or resource mobilization theory, or Foran's theory of revolutions to civil resistance practice and studies?
- ✘ It is argued that greater effectiveness is possible if we build strategies on some established theories and understandings of movements and social change.

# OVERVIEW OF THE LECTURE

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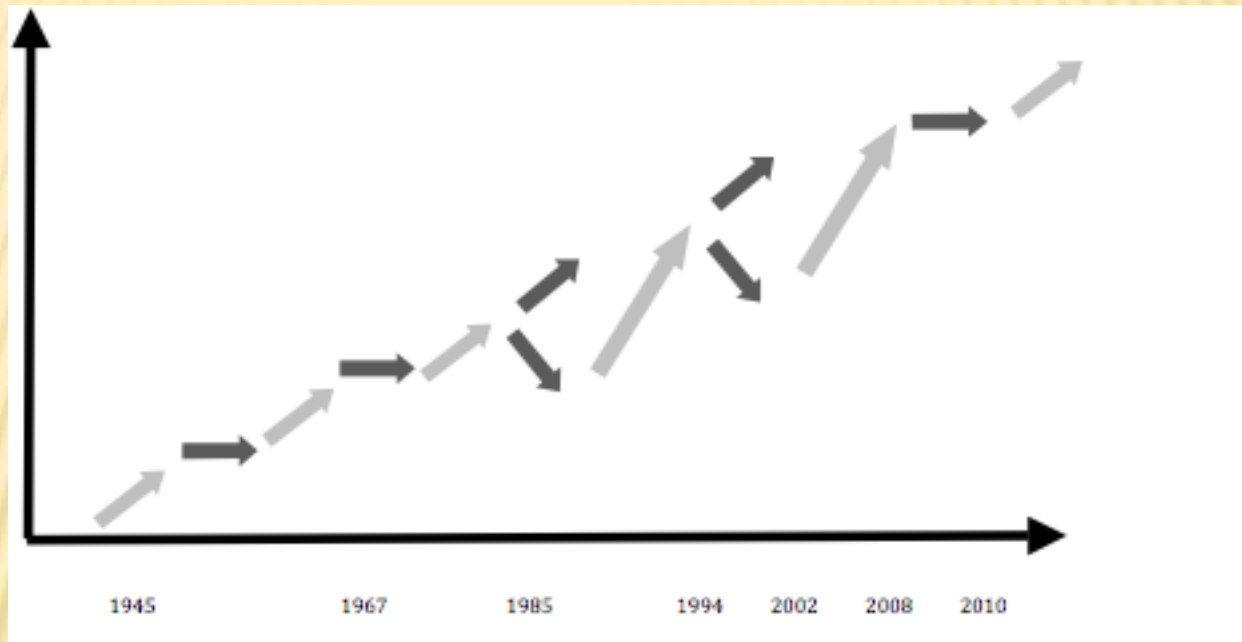
- ✘ Studies of Nonviolent Action or Civil Resistance focus on strategies and outcomes of actions
- ✘ Strategies/Actions are employed in a *context* and depend on several different *non-strategic activities* movements do
- ✘ Thus, effectiveness depends on *how* strategies and actions are *applied* in relation to contexts and movements.
- ✘ In order to improve strategies we need to understand the environment of its application

# SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY

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Social Movement theories suggest several factors matters for movement growth and success;

1. Historical macro-change (eg urbanization)
2. Movement cycles (waves)



The Swedish Disability movement 1945-2010 (legal progress and year)



# SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY

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- ③ Frustration (especially “relative deprivation”)
- ④ Resource Mobilization (eg skills, money, communication, education, organization)

# SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY

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5. Political Opportunity Structures (eg alliances, cleavages, repression, state strategy)
6. Framing (claiming what is a “problem”, who is responsible, and how/who can a solution be made)
7. Collective identity (construction of a “We”)

## EXAMPLE OF APPLICATION – THE CASE OF MST

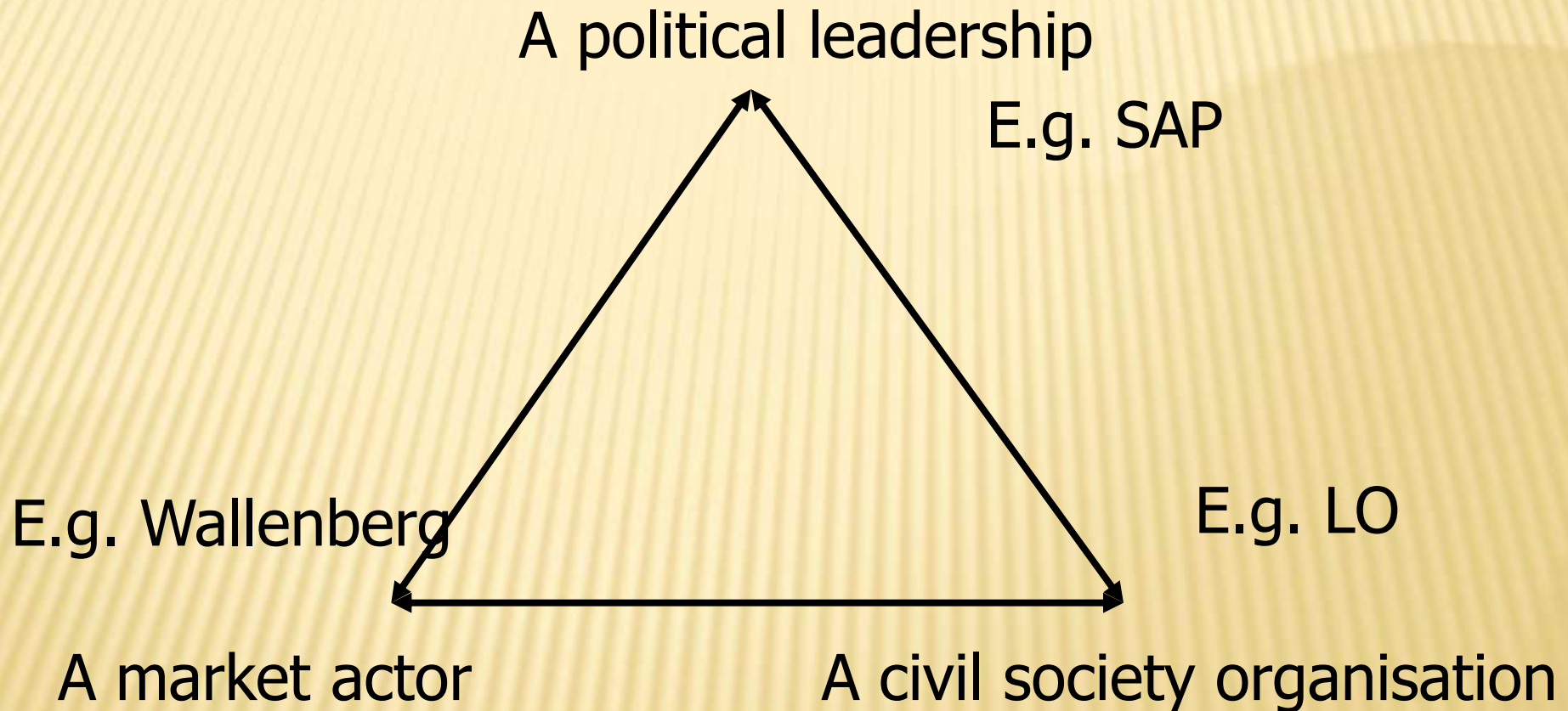
- ✘ The movement of the landless (MST) has done so far over 2 000 land occupations, mobilized 1,5 million, and liberated land equal to whole Cuba since early 1980s. Despite 1 killed each week they are not armed and continues to grow...

# EXAMPLE OF APPLICATION: MOVEMENT'S CREATION OF A NEW SOCIETY – THE CASE OF MST

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- ✘ The “we” construction (join through self-definition and action)
- ✘ Movement socialization (e.g. in own schools)
- ✘ Socio-material reproduction (in line with own values)
- ✘ Politicisation of the everyday (life in camps/settlements)
- ✘ Movement stories part of everyday and reconstruct history (e.g. MST-birth)
- ✘ Cultural reconstruction (of the dominant culture) (e.g. national flag, cross)
- ✘ Movement rituals and ceremonies (e.g. Mística, example: the new leadership)

# EXAMPLE: HEGEMONY (GRAMSCI)



An alliance between key actors in three sectors

# “REVOLUTIONS”: DEFINITIONS

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- ✘ **Reform:** planned change of *elements* within a system (e.g. ecological sustainable production; unemployment benefits)
- ✘ **Revolution:** planned change of *system* (e.g. political revolution in South Africa)
- ✘ **Great revolution:** planned change of *political, economic and social system*

# FACTORS OF THIRD WORLD REVOLUTIONS

- ① Economic dependency (non-diversified, growth of BNP & negative social effects)
- ② Repressive dictatorship (exclusionary, personalist)
- ③ World-systemic opening (e.g. strong world/regional states tolerate)
- ④ Economic downturn
- ⑤ Political cultures of opposition

(from John Foran 1997 *Theorizing Revolutions*; 2005 *Taking Power*)

# REVOLUTIONARY OUTCOMES DEPENDS ON SEVERAL MORE FACTORS ...

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- ✘ Always more than two actors
- ✘ Not all of them are domestic (the US, China, IMF, CNN/BBC, etc.)
- ✘ Diplomacy /policy-based factors
- ✘ Religious/Cultural
- ✘ The role of the elite
- ✘ Etc.



# TIME FOR DISCUSSIONS

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- ✘ What contribution do you think that other social sciences can make to our improvement of effective nonviolent action or civil resistance?
- ✘ Which specific theories or research fields are promising?
- ✘ Why is there not more of interaction between NVA-studies and other fields of study?
- ✘ What could be done to improve it?

# QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS WELCOME!

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