

EXPERIENCES OF NOVIOLENCE: THE MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY PERIODS

It was not just war that enabled the United States to win its independence. Earlier, before the war, the 13 British colonies had embarked on a forgotten decade of nonviolence. Considerable sectors of the community responded to oppressive taxation and legislation with protests, performances, boycotts and their refusal to comply with British taxes and products. One important boycott was the **Boston Tea Party** of 1773, where the protestors dumped an East Indian Company shipment of tea directly into the ocean, promoting the consumption of coffee in the colonies as an alternative. They also created parallel structures, such as the **First Continental Congress** in Philadelphia, in 1774, to coordinate nonviolent anticolonialist actions. But British military repression would spur the start of the war, and the **Second Congress** decided to coordinate an armed response, given their lack of nonviolent tools or preparation for this phase of the conflict.

After World War II, Germany was divided into East and West, each controlled by the forces that had defeated the Nazis. Given the lack of freedoms, many people in the East fled to the West. For this reason, on 13 August 1961, the Soviets decided to prevent people from crossing Berlin ever again and built a concrete wall that would last for 28 years. The nonviolent activity increased, and every Monday in 1989 crowds of people would come together outside of the Protestant church of Leipzig, shouting "We are the people" and demanding freedoms. Moreover, the massive numbers of people who were fleeing East Germany were leaving countless jobs vacant. Helpless, the Soviet government ultimately gave up. That night, thousands of people took to the streets to tear down the wall. The nonviolence of the united people and the massive exodus were decisive for this change.

Throughout history, men and women have learned and developed nonviolent techniques based on their experience. Nonviolence enabled them to build a better future.

If they could do this, couldn't I do it too?

