

Call for Papers

Advancing Social Defence – Current Issues and Practical Challenges

Scientific Symposium, 6-7 September 2024, Bielefeld University of Applied Sciences (HSBI)

"Social defence" (or civilian-based defence) is a concept of nonviolent resistance in the event of internal revolts or wars of aggression. It involves organised and trained citizens confronting organised military actors by applying nonviolent methods (non-cooperation, strikes, boycotts/buycotts, dynamic continuation of work without collaboration, service by the book, etc.) to force the opposing party to give up. The declared aim of social defence is to protect social institutions and infrastructures and to preserve life, democratic and self-determined ways of life and the necessities of life without surrendering to an attacker. Social defence thus stands in the tradition of the practice of revolutionary struggles, nonviolent resistance, social movements and civil campaigns.

The concept was developed in its modern version in peace research after Second World War – the catalyst being the danger of a nuclear war between NATO and the Warsaw Pact and the realisation that such a war would result in no victors, but only general annihilation (e.g. King-Hall 1958, Roberts ed. 1967). Since the publication of the central theoretical and empirical texts on social defence in the 1970s and 1980s (cf. Ebert 1968, Boserup & Mack 1974, Ebert 1981, Galtung 1982, Jochheim 1988, and many more) and the founding of the "Bund für Soziale Verteidigung" (Federation of Social Defence; in 1989), the multitude of the practical dimensions of social defence have become clear, but specific questions that have arisen since then – for example on the organizability of social defence, on the challenges of new technologies and techniques of surveillance and repression, but also on the effectiveness of nonviolence – have not been addressed by research focused on social defence.

At the same time, new branches of research have emerged, e.g. on civil resistance (Resistance Studies – e.g. Vinthagen 2015; Quantitative Research on "Civil Resistance" – e.g. Chenoweth/Stephan 2012; more recent Protest Research), on just and resilient societies (e.g. Postcolonial Studies, Transformation Studies, Sustainability Studies) or on the organisation of revolutions and campaigns, the results of which have not yet been systematically translated into the framework of social defence as a practical method for action.

Against the backdrop of renewed interest in social defence in Germany over the past two years, the symposium will address pressing and fundamental questions of social defence from an academic perspective. Essential practical questions will be addressed in concrete terms and fundamental challenges will be considered in the depth they deserve.

Challenges and questions for social defence that are suitable for this symposium are (not exclusively):

- General and theoretical considerations
 - Whose values are to be defended and how? Cases on the fringes between a universalist humanity and group-based hatred.
 - How can the relationship between social defence and the idea of a "just peace" be conceived and effectively implemented?

- How do social defence and considerations of “law-preserving violence” relate to each other? To what extent does social defence integrate violence in the sense of a broad concept of violence?
- What concepts of a combination of nonviolent and military defence (the so-called “mix”) exist, and how can they be assessed in terms of their suitability for reality? Does any form of violent civil resistance jeopardise the possibilities of successful social defence?
- What is the difference between social defence and civil defence?
- What new examples of social defence have been researched and documented in the last thirty years? What new insights from the “classic” examples have been gained (e.g. Kapp Putsch 1920, Ruhrkampf 1923, World War II, Prague 1968)?
- What new questions arise for social defence in the face of modern warfare (e.g. drones, increased vulnerability of civilian infrastructure, hybrid warfare, etc.)?
- Is social defence to be localised at state or at civil society level?
- Before the practice:
 - What concrete steps (e.g. identifying and preparing groups in need of protection) would have to be taken to set up social defence?
 - Preparing social defence with municipal stakeholders: Challenges and opportunities
 - Is a certain understanding of nonviolence a prerequisite for social defence (“strategic nonviolence”, inner attitude)?
- During the practice:
 - How should social defence be organised? Which models of resistance practice are suitable for which application?
 - Does social defence need charismatic leaders, martyrs or heroes in order to attract international attention and gain visibility?
 - How many people need to be nonviolently active in order to be successful? Is Chenoweth & Stephan's “3.5% assumption” tenable?
 - What needs to be prepared for the protection of the population and activists, and by whom? What lessons can be learnt from the practice of “Unarmed Civilian Protection”?

The following formats will be possible at the symposium:

- Paper presentations
- Workshops/interactive ideas

The conference language is expected to be English. Arrangements can be made in consultation with the conference organisers to translate German-language contributions into English.

Please submit a meaningful abstract of 2,000-10,000 characters by 31 March 2024. The abstract should include: Topic and research question, rough outline of the response framework, self-assessment (theoretical or practice-based work), and presentation format.

The conference is organized by organizations involved in the campaign on Social Defence that was started in 2022 (www.wehrhaftohnewaffen.de).

Contact information and submission:

Mail: conference@soziale-verteidigung.de

Literature cited:

Anders Boserup / Andrew Mack (1974): War without weapons? A study of the possibilities and successes of social defence. Reinbek: rororo aktuell.

Erica Chenoweth / Maria Stephan (2011): Why Civil Resistance works. The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict. New York: Columbia University Press.

Theodor Ebert (1968): Nonviolent Uprising - Alternative to Civil War. Freiburg i.Br.: Waldkircher Verlagsgesellschaft

Theodor Ebert (1981): Social defence. Waldkirch, Waldkircher Verlagsgesellschaft

Johan Galtung (1982): Defending differently. Contributions to peace and conflict research. Reinbek: Rowohlt.

Gernot Jochheim (1988): Social defence - defence with a human face. A handout. Düsseldorf: Patmos.

Stephen King-Hall (1958): Defence in the Nuclear Age, London

Adam Roberts (ed) (1967): The Strategy of Civilian Defence. Non-violent Resistance to Aggression. London

Stellan Vinthagen (2015): A Theory of Nonviolent Action: How Civil Resistance Works. London: ZED Books.