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When Non- Violence is Suicide

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2001

It's the autumn of 2025 AD. The technoindustrial system fell apart a year ago, but you and your friends are doing alright. Your garden has flourished this past summer and in your cabin you have a good supply of dried vegetables, dried beans and other foodstuffs to get you through the coming winter. Just now you're harvesting your potatoes. With your spades, you and your friends uproot one potato after another and pick the plump tubers out of the soil.

Suddenly the friend at your elbow nudges you and you look up. Uh-oh. A gang of mean-looking men is coming up your trail. They have guns. They look like trouble, but you stand firm. The leader of the gang walks up to you and says,

"Nice looking potatoes you got there."

"Yeah," you reply. "They're nice-looking potatoes."

"We're going to take them" says the gang leader.

"The hell you are!" you answer. "We spent a long summer of hard work growing those potatoes. . . ."

The gang leader points his rifle at your face and says, "— you, punk." To his men he adds, "Dick, Ziggy, check the cabin and see what kind of food they got. We might just move in and spend the winter here. Mick, grab that bitch over there before she gets away. She got a nice ass. We'll all screw her tonight."

You get angry and start shouting, "You bastard! You can't. . . ."

The rifle goes BANG. You're dead.

—

Nonviolence works only when you have the police to protect you. In the absence of police protection, nonviolence is very nearly the equivalent to suicide.

Admittedly this has not been true at all times and places. Among the African Pygmies as described by Colin Turnbull, deadly violence against humans was almost unknown. In other nomadic hunting and gathering societies people sometimes kill one another in fights, but they never conquer one another's territory or systematically slaughter other tribes. Under these conditions, nonviolence is not inconsistent with survival.

But, realistically, these are not the conditions that will prevail if and when the technoindustrial system collapses. There are a lot of mean people out there: Nazis, Hell's Angels, Ku Klux Klanners,

the Mafia . . . many others do not belong to recognized groups. They aren't going to disappear into thin air when the system falls apart. They will still be around. They probably wouldn't be successful at growing their own food even if they tried, and they won't try, because people of that type will find it much more congenial to take someone else's food than to grow their own. And since they are vicious, they may kill you or rape you just for the fun of it, even when they don't need your food.

Many ordinary people, too, who under present conditions are peaceful and mild-mannered, may turn vicious when they are desperate for food or good agricultural land in which to grow it. Food shortages may not be critical in so-called "backward" areas of the world where the peasants are still relatively self-sufficient, but in the industrialized countries, where agriculture is completely dependent on pesticides, chemical fertilizers and fuel for tractors (among other things) and in which few people have the skill to grow their own food efficiently, food shortages are sure to be acute when the system collapses.

Let's even assume for the sake of argument that industrialized countries have enough arable land so that all people will, in theory, be able to grow their own food by primitive methods. In the absence of a functioning government, there will no way of distributing the city dwellers over the countryside and systematically assigning each family its own plot of land. Consequently, there will be chaos and confusion. Some people will try to grab the most or the best land for themselves, other will oppose them and deadly fights will break out. Armed groups will organize themselves for their own protection or for aggressive purposes. If you want to survive the collapse of this system, you had better be armed yourself and prepared to use your weapon efficiently. This means being prepared psychologically as well as physically.

Being armed and prepared to fight in self defense will not only be a necessary condition for your own survival, it will be your duty. The Nazi's, Hell's Angels and the Ku Klux Klanners will not be the most dangerous enemies of freedom. Because these people are unruly, turbulent and lawless, they are unlikely to create large, efficient organizations. Far more dangerous will be the kind of people who form

the backbone of the present system, the people who are adapted to life in disciplined organizations: the "bourgeois" types—the engineers, business executives, bureaucrats, military officers, some police and so forth. These people will be anxious to reestablish order, organization and the technological system as quickly as possible. Their methods will be less crude than those of the Nazis and Hell's Angels but they won't hesitate to use force and violence when these are necessary for the achievement of their objectives. You MUST be prepared to defend yourself physically against these people.