

Student handout 4.4

Is violence acceptable in some cases?

Case 1

During a demonstration on the issue of anti-globalisation, a small group of people starts throwing stones at the headquarters building of a famous trans-national company. The police force present on the spot sees this taking place and tries to arrest the people involved. During this intervention, a policeman is captured by the people throwing stones and is seriously beaten.

Questions:

1. Would it be acceptable for the police force to use their guns to shoot at the people throwing stones?
2. Would it be acceptable for the police to intervene using machine guns? (This intervention would be faster, but would almost certainly result in more casualties.)
3. Would it be acceptable for the police to wait until they are able to intervene using a water cannon?
4. Would it be acceptable for the police not to intervene by using force, in order to avoid escalation of the conflict?

Case 2

Country X declares war on country Y because Y clearly protects and even finances rebel groups operating against country X from within country Y. Country X's intelligence team discovers in which village a group of well-trained and armed rebels are staying, and finds out that they are preparing a major bomb attack on an important industrial target.

Questions:

1. Would it be acceptable for country X to bomb the village heavily, making sure only a few people, including local inhabitants, survive?
2. Would the former be acceptable after a clear request to the rebels to surrender and a clear warning to the local population to leave the village and to gather in the local sports stadium, where they would be allowed in after being searched for weapons?
3. Would it be acceptable not to intervene by using force? What alternatives can you think of?

Case 3

Mr X, a young man working as a technical assistant at the local hospital, regularly beats his wife when he arrives home drunk. His wife once informed the police about the beatings by her husband, which are sometimes serious. The neighbour's wife, who accidentally became aware of the situation, can now imagine what is going on next door when she hears her neighbours arguing and shouting.

Questions:

1. Should the neighbour's wife inform the police in such cases, or is that an unacceptable intrusion into her neighbour's privacy?
2. When they receive information from someone, should the police intervene in these circumstances?

Case 4

Leo, 13, is a slim and rather small young boy. He is often bullied by some older boys while he is playing in the local playground. This time, he replies that they should not harass him all the time, and that they are behaving like non-educated, primitive people. As a consequence, the older boys start beating him severely. Leo's friend sees this happening when he enters the playground. Some elderly people also see it happening when they cross the playground on their way back home after buying food at the market.

Questions:

1. Should Leo's friend intervene in this case? How?
2. Should the elderly people intervene? How?
3. What other solutions would you suggest?