

The Voluntaryist

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"If one takes care of the means, the end will take care of itself."

October, 1982

Statement of Purpose

The Voluntaryists are libertarians who have organized to promote non-political strategies to achieve a free society. We reject electoral politics, in theory and in practice, as incompatible with libertarian principles. Governments must cloak their actions in an aura of moral legitimacy in order to sustain their power, and political methods invariably strengthen that legitimacy. Voluntaryists seek instead to delegitimize the State through education, and we advocate withdrawal of the co-operation and tacit consent on which State power ultimately depends.

THE ETHICS OF VOTING

By George H. Smith

PART I

I. Introduction

A detailed libertarian critique of electoral voting is long overdue. Political libertarians (i.e., those who support the effort to elect libertarians to political office) are usually silent on the moral implications of electoral voting. When challenged, they typically dismiss moral objections out of hand, as if the voluntaryist (i.e., anti-voting) case deserved nothing more than a cursory reply.

This situation will probably change in the near future. The issues raised in voluntaryist arguments are far too important to be discarded without careful consideration, even if one ultimately rejects voluntaryist conclusions. This is especially true for those *political anarchists* (if I may use that curious phrase) who support the Libertarian Party. If it is at least comprehensible why minarchists (advocates of minimal government) support a political party, the spectacle of political anarchists is far more perplexing. Hence this essay (to be continued in subsequent issues of *The Voluntaryist*) is directed primarily at political anarchists, though some of the material is relevant to minarchists as well.

The purpose of this essay is to explore the moral implications of libertarians (especially anarchists) holding political office, running for political office, or assisting those who do—primarily through the vote. The ethics of voting cannot be divorced from the key question of what one is voting *for*. And this, as I shall argue, cannot be divorced from the institutional framework in which the voting occurs.

This essay is directed to fellow libertarians who are familiar with the standard debates in contemporary libertarianism, such as that between minarchism and anarchism. I must also assume that the reader is generally familiar with the basic approach of voluntaryism. (If not, my essay *Party*

Dialogue should be consulted, along with the other essays in "The Voluntaryist Series.") Moreover, standard terms in the libertarian lexicon—e.g., "invasion" and "aggression" (which I use synonymously)—are not defined in this essay. Here again standard libertarian works should be consulted, such as various books and essays by Murray Rothbard. A term that may generate some confusion is "electoral voting." This means voting for the purpose of placing someone in a political office. It does not refer to other kinds of political voting, such as voting on particular issues in a referendum. (This requires a somewhat different analysis.) Hereafter, unless otherwise noted, the simple term "voting" shall be used to mean "electoral voting."

Since this essay is to appear in installments, I must beg the reader's pardon if some problems remain unsolved at the conclusion of each part. The theory of voting has been so neglected that it is difficult to explore its moral implications without first laying a good deal of preliminary groundwork. Some pro-voting arguments are based on different premises and actually clash with each other when employed by the same person. Other pro-voting arguments appear decisive, but they retain this appearance at the expense not only of voluntaryism, but of principles common to *all* libertarian theories (especially anarchism). These "kamikaze arguments" attack voluntaryism by undercutting the foundations of libertarian political analysis, thus exploding political arguments later.) For one libertarian to use a kamikaze argument against another libertarian is somewhat indelicate, to say the least.

The theory of voting should be investigated within a broad framework of political and legal theory. This plunges us into complex and troublesome areas, like principal-agent relationships, accessories before the fact, aiders and abettors of crime, and so forth. I do not presume to have solved the problems these concepts create for libertarian theory, but libertarianism undeniably depends on *some* notion of accountability for persons other than those *directly* involved in criminal (i.e., aggressive) acts.

Libertarians generally agree that the driver of a getaway car is liable for a bank robbery, even if he did not personally wield a gun or threaten force. Similarly, we hold legislators accountable for their unjust laws, political executives accountable for their unjust directives, and judges accountable for their unjust decisions. We do not exonerate these individuals just because they legitimize their actions under the "mask of law." Yet political and bureaucratic personnel rarely participate in law enforcement; they do not strap on guns and apprehend violators. This is left to the police.

Clearly, therefore, the libertarian (anarchist) condemnation of the State as a criminal gang rests on the view that criminal liability can extend beyond the person who uses, or threatens to use, invasive force. Most of the individuals in government, though not directly involved in aggression, nevertheless "aid and abet" this process. Libertarian theory would be irreparably crippled without this presumption. If criminal accountability is restricted only to direct aggressors, then the vast majority of individuals in the State apparatus, including those at the highest levels of decision-making, must be con-

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EDITORIAL

NEITHER BULLETS NOR BALLOTS

By Wendy McElroy

The Voluntaryist seeks to reclaim the anti-political heritage of libertarianism. It seeks to reestablish the clear, clean difference between the economic and the political means of changing society. This difference was well perceived by the forerunners of contemporary libertarianism who tore the veil of legitimacy away from government to reveal a criminal institution which claimed a monopoly of force in a given area. Accordingly, early libertarians such as Benjamin Tucker maintained that one could no more attack government by electing politicians than one could prevent crime by becoming a criminal. Although he did not question the sincerity of political anarchists, he described them as enemies of liberty: "those who distrust her as a means of progress, believing in her only as an end to be obtained by first trampling upon, violating, and outraging her." This rejection of the political process (by which I mean electoral politics) was a moral one based on the insight that no one has the right to a position of power over others and that any man who seeks such an office, however honorable his intentions, is seeking to join a criminal band.

Somewhere in the history of libertarianism, this rejection of the State has been eroded to the point that anarchists are now aspiring politicians and can hear the words "anarchist Senator" without flinching. No longer is libertarianism directed against the positions of power, against the offices through which the State is manifested; the modern message—complete with straw hats, campaign rhetoric and strategic evasion—is "elect my man to office" as if it were the man disgracing the office and not the other way around. Those who point out that no one has the right to such a position, that such power is anathema to the concept of rights itself, are dismissed as negative, reactionary or crackpot. They are subject to ad hominem attacks which divert attention from the substantive issues being raised, the issues which will be discussed in *The Voluntaryist*.

The Voluntaryist is unique in that it reflects both the several centuries of libertarian tradition and the current cutting edge of libertarian theory. The tradition of American libertarianism is so inextricably linked with anarchism that, during the Nineteenth Century, individualist-anarchism was a synonym for libertarianism. But anarchism is more than simply the non-initiation of force by which libertarianism is commonly defined. It is a view of the State as the major violator of rights, as the main enemy. Anarchism analyzes the State as an institution whose purpose is to violate rights in order to secure benefits to a privileged class. For those who believe in the propriety of a limited government it makes sense to pursue political office, but for an anarchist who views the State

as a fundamentally evil institution such a pursuit flies in the face of the theory and the tradition which he claims to share. Thus, the political anarchist must explain why he aspires to an office he proclaims inherently unjust. Perhaps one reason for the erosion of anarchism within the libertarian movement is that many of the questions necessary to a libertarian institutional analysis of the State have never been seriously addressed. A goal of *The Voluntaryist* is to construct a cohesive theory of anti-political libertarianism, of Voluntaryism, which will investigate such issues as whether moral or legal liabilities adhere to the act of voting someone into power over another's life. Perhaps by working out the basics of this theory the unhappy spectacle of "the anarchist as politician" can be avoided.

Another major goal is to examine non-political strategies. In constructing anti-political theory and strategy—which was assumed by early libertarians without being well defined—we will be labeled as merely counter Libertarian Party by those who innocently or with malice are unable to perceive the wider context which leads to a rejection of the political means itself. The myriad of non-political strategies available to libertarians will be dismissed or will be accepted only as useful adjuncts to electoral politics. It is ironic that a movement which uses the free market as a solution for everything from roads to national defense declares that political means, the antithesis of the free market, are necessary to achieve freedom.

As Voluntaryists we reject the Libertarian Party on the same level and for the same reason we reject any other political party. The rejection is not based on incidental evasions or corruption of principle which inevitably occur within politics. It is based on the conviction that to oppose the State one must oppose the specific instances of the State or else one's opposition is toward a vague, floating abstraction and never has practical application. Political offices are the State. By becoming politicians libertarians legitimize and perpetuate the office. They legitimize and perpetuate the State.

If libertarianism has a future, it is as the movement which takes a principled, resounding stance against the State. Those who embrace political office hinder the efforts of

Voluntaryists who are attempting to throw off this institution of force. It is common for libertarians to view anarchism and minarchism as two trains going down the same track; minarchism simply stops a little before anarchism's destination. This is a mistaken notion. The destination of anarchism is different from and antagonistic to the destination of minarchism. The theory and the emotional commitment are different. Murray Rothbard captured the emotional difference by asking his famous question in *Libertarian Forum*, "Do you Hate the State?" Voluntaryists respond with an immediate, heartfelt "yes". Minarchists give reserved, qualified agreement all the while explaining the alleged distinction between a government and a state. Political anarchists are in the gray realm of agreeing heartily in words to principles which their actions contradict. It is time to have the differences between Voluntaryism and political libertarianism clearly expressed and for non-political alternatives to be pursued.

It is time for *The Voluntaryist*.

In our first issue we are pleased to include part one of a series by George H. Smith. This series is a pioneering step toward a theory of voting which incorporates an institutional analysis of the State. Comments on this or other aspects of *The Voluntaryist* are welcomed.

sidered nonaggressors by libertarian standards and hence totally innocent. We could not even regard Hitler or Stalin as aggressors, so long as they did not personally enforce their monstrous orders. The only condemnable persons would be in the police, military, and in other groups assigned to the enforcement of state decrees. All others would be *legally* innocent (though we might regard them as morally culpable).

Few libertarians are willing to accept this bizarre conclusion, but it automatically follows if we refuse to incorporate within libertarian theory some idea of "vicarious liability" defined by *Black's Law Dictionary* as "indirect legal responsibility; for example, the liability of...a principal for torts and contracts of agents").

Libertarian theorists have virtually ignored vicarious liability in three respects: first, they have rarely acknowledged it as an implicit underpinning in the libertarian (especially anarchist) analysis of the State; second, they have neglected to provide a thorough study and justification of it; third (and most relevant to this discussion), they have not examined its implications for the theory of voting.

I shall not attempt to defend a theory of vicarious liability here, despite the crucial need for such a defense. Because I am addressing fellow libertarians—most of whom accept some version of this principle—I shall accept vicarious liability as a given within libertarian theory and proceed from this foundation. Libertarian theory in general, and anarchist theory in particular, would tread perilously close to incoherence without this presumption. Given this fact, it follows that voters, in some cases at least, are deemed accountable by libertarians for the results of their votes (e.g., legislators who vote for victimless crime laws). *And this liability attaches despite the fact that the voters do not directly engage in aggression or explicit threats of aggression.* It is incongruous, therefore, for a political libertarian to profess bewilderment that even a *prima facie* case against voting may exist, on the ground that voting is obviously a nonaggressive act. If voting *per se* is deemed nonaggressive, if the voter is *never* accountable for what occurs afterwards, then this attack on vicarious liability succeeds in smashing voluntarism at the considerable expense of rendering incoherent the libertarian analysis of the State. Thus do kamikaze arguments "succeed".

The libertarian who seriously believes that voting is always nonaggressive—"How," he asks, "can pulling a lever in a voting booth constitute aggression?"—is led by his own logic to conclude that voting for *any* candidate is permissible by libertarian standards, regardless of what the aspiring politician promises to do while in office. A candidate might promise to imprison all redheads in slave labor camps, or to order the execution of all Catholics on sight. But on a strict nonaccountability theory of voting, the voters who placed these politicians in office are in no way liable for their criminal acts. And since—as political libertarians like to remind us—libertarian theory forbids *only* aggressive acts, there would be nothing inconsistent in a libertarian voting for these power-seekers, because all voting, by definition, is nonaggressive.

Moreover, the successful libertarian politician would find it *impossible*, qua office holder, to violate libertarian principles while in office. If voting is never aggressive, then the libertarian legislator can never be aggressive (and hence unlibertarian) regardless of *what* he votes for. Would a libertarian legislator who voted for a draft be regarded by members of the Libertarian Party as having acted contrary to libertarian principle? Most certainly. But if libertarianism forbids aggressive acts only, and if voting can never be an aggressive

act, then in no sense can the pro-draft legislator be accused of behaving in an anti-libertarian fashion.

Political libertarians who endorse a nonaccountability theory of voting will have to grapple with its many paradoxes. After its implications are understood, it is unlikely to find many defenders. Some political libertarians already concede that a voter may be accountable. For example, Jeff Hummel, a prominent anarchist and supporter of the LP, maintains that "any legislator who votes for an unjust law is...in fact one of the actual aggressors!" (*Free Texas*, Fall, 1981). Does this argument extend a step further back? Do voters who place these politicians in power share liability for the resulting injustice? Unfortunately, this is one crucial question among many on which political libertarians remain silent.

I have argued briefly that the voluntarist case against political voting cannot be dismissed as *prima facie* absurd by political libertarians. This is because political libertarians share with voluntarists a theory of vicarious liability on which the case against voting is built. (see p. 7 of manuscript) Deny vicarious liability...and political libertarians will be hard-pressed to retrieve their own theory from the wreckage strewn about by their kamikaze attack.

Of course, to establish the *prima facie* possibility of the voluntarist case does not cinch the argument. Many more arguments and principles need to be considered. But we have at least cleared a path along which the rest of this article may travel.

II. The Burden of Proof

Before proceeding to an analysis of electoral voting and the arguments pro and con, it may prove helpful to establish some procedural guidelines. Foremost in any argument is the burden of proof. Who assumes the burden of proof in a given dispute? Which side must produce the preponderance of evidence and/or arguments in order to resolve the case? Most important, if the responsible party fails to meet the burden of proof, then what is the status of the dispute?

In the voting debate, it is usually assumed that the burden of proof rests with the voluntarist, i.e., the opponent of voting. If the voluntarist claims that voting is inconsistent with libertarianism or anarchism, then he must substantiate his claim. He must show that electoral voting actually falls within the category of actions known as "invasive" or "aggressive." Failure to accomplish this acquits the political libertarian, or the political anarchist, of all charges.

This procedure seems reasonable. To condemn voting as improper is a serious charge, after all, and it appears that the voluntarist should assume the burden of proof if he expects to be taken seriously. We see a parallel in legal theory, where a man is *presumed* innocent until this presumption is "defeated," i.e., until the defendant is proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. The legal presumption of innocence determines where the burden of proof rests. Failure to provide sufficient proof means that the presumption remains where it began: the defendant is innocent.

The legal analogy is accurate in one respect. It points out that the burden of proof is fixed according to the basic *presumption* of an argument. If, as we have seen, an accused man is presumed innocent, then the onus falls upon his accuser to defeat this presumption. A presumption functions as the starting point in a dispute.

From the legal analogy, however, it does not follow automatically that the political libertarian is analogous to the defendant, and thus it does not follow that the burden of

proof lies entirely upon the voluntarist. Indeed, in dealing with *anarchism*—the principled rejection of the State—I maintain that there is a presumption *against* political office-holding and therefore a presumption against voting for political office. Thus the political anarchist is the one who must defeat the basic presumption. When two anarchists debate the ethics of voting, it is the political anarchist who assumes the major burden of proof. It is the political anarchist who must demonstrate to the voluntarist why voting—an overt participation in the political process—is not a violation of their common anarchist principles. Let us examine this claim in more detail.

Voluntaryists are more than libertarians; they are libertarian anarchists. They reject the institution of the state totally, and it is this element that is not contained (explicitly, at least) within libertarianism. Libertarian theory condemns invasive (rights-violating) acts and says that all human interaction should be voluntary. All libertarians, whether minarchists or anarchists, accept this. It is the defining characteristic of a libertarian.

Libertarian anarchism professes not only the nonaggression principle, but the additional view that the State is *necessarily* invasive and should thus stand condemned. Libertarian anarchism combines the libertarian principle of nonaggression with a particular analysis of the State—an analysis not shared by libertarian minarchists. It is the premise of nonaggression, *coupled with an institutional analysis of the State*, that leads to the rejection of the State by the anarchist as inconsistent with libertarian principles.

The above reference to “institutional analysis” is critical. One cannot progress from libertarianism to anarchism without an intervening argument. A principled rejection of the State does not necessarily follow from the nonaggression principle, unless one can also show that the State is necessarily aggressive. This latter point—the anarchist insight into the nature of the State—is the minor premise required to justify anarchism:

Major premise: Libertarian theory condemns all invasive acts.

Minor premise: All States commit invasive acts.

Conclusion: Libertarian theory condemns all States (or governments—I use the terms interchangeably).

This syllogism illustrates the difference between simple libertarianism (articulated in the major premise) and libertarian anarchism (articulated in the conclusion). The transition to anarchism is realized through the anarchist insight (articulated in the minor premise). This insight is what all libertarian anarchists share with fellow anarchists. It is also what distinguishes libertarian anarchists from their minarchist cousins.

Minarchists qualify as authentic libertarians so long as they believe it possible for their minimal State to remain nonaggressive. The minarchist, like the anarchist, accepts the nonaggression principle; but the minarchist does not accept the anarchist view of the State. This controversy over the minor premise leads to different applications of the nonaggression principle to the State. (Whether this stems from a definitional dispute or from something more substantial need not concern us here.)

The minarchist issues a challenge to all libertarian anarchists, political and voluntarist alike: “Prove that all governments are invasive. Demonstrate that the State, by its very nature, *must* violate individual rights.” The anarchist

responds, as indicated earlier, with an institutional analysis of the State. He avers that institutional features of the State, such as the claim of sovereign jurisdiction over a given geographical area, render the State invasive *per se*. This invasive trait persists regardless of *who* occupies positions of power in the State or *what* their *individual* purposes may be. The anarchist insight, in order words, is not arrived at inductively. The anarchist does not investigate *every* employee of every State, determine each individual to be an aggressor, and then generalize from the individual to the institution. On the contrary, the State is assessed first, qua institution, according to constant structural features inhering in all governments. This institutional analysis leads to the anarchist insight, after which particular individuals within the State are considered to be part of a “criminal gang” owing to their participation in the exercise of State power.

To put it another way: for anarchism, the individual does not taint the institution; rather, the institution taints the individuals who work within it. It is because the nature of the State as an institution renders it irredeemably invasive that we condemn particular offices within the State apparatus, and hence particular individuals who occupy those offices. Such individuals “aid and abet” State injustice, even though they may not *personally* commit aggressive acts.

It is necessary to understand that the institutional analysis sketched here is vital to all theories of anarchism, including political anarchism. This kind of institutional analysis must be valid if anarchism is to have a solid footing. It is simply impossible for anarchists to derive anarchism from the inductive method described above. It is patently impossible to examine the personal motives and goals of all individuals who comprise “the State” before we can pass judgment on the State itself. In addition, if this research were undertaken, we would find that the vast majority of State employees never *intend* to aggress against others, nor do they participate *directly* in aggressive acts. The inductive method never permits us to bridge the gap between individuals and institutions. Indeed, from a purely inductive perspective, there is no “State.” Only individuals exist and act; there are no institutions. The State, then, is a fiction, and it is nonsense to refer to the “State” as “invasive” or “aggressive.” Only individuals can invade or aggress; and although some individuals within that organization we call the “State” may personally aggress, the vast majority do not. To condemn the State *per se*, therefore, as the anarchist wishes to do—and by implication to condemn all individuals within the State—is flagrantly unjust. It is to besmirch the good names of innumerable State employees who never personally engage in aggression.

This methodological objection to anarchism is important, and anarchists, as I have indicated, will be unable to respond adequately unless they defend the approach I have described as institutional analysis. The coherence of anarchism as a theory hangs on this kind of analysis.

Why is this relevant to the debate over voting? Because it illustrates that the presumption, and therefore the burden of proof, varies according to whether the voluntarist addresses a minarchist or a political anarchist. Since the minarchist need not adopt an institutional analysis, he will not view the fact that an individual is an agent of the State as even *prima facie* evidence of improper conduct. There is, for the minarchist, no moral “curse” on the State as such, which then filters down to individuals within the State. Working for the State, in other words, does not constitute a presumption of guilt. The individual is presumed “innocent” until proven

otherwise, despite his institutional affiliations.

This is why the minarchist is a difficult convert to voluntarism. Usually the minarchist must be brought first to anarchism, which requires that he accept an institutional analysis of the State, and only then to voluntarism. The procedural chasm dividing voluntarists from minarchists is so wide that this intermediate step is ordinarily required. The burden of proof falls upon the anarchist to establish the soundness of this intermediate step.

But the situation changes when the voluntarist addresses a political anarchist. Here the anarchist insight—the recognition of the State *per se* as an invasive institution—is agreed upon by all parties before the argument over voting even commences. Both disputants utilized institutional analysis in order to arrive at their current positions. It is plainly inconsistent, therefore, for the political anarchist to reject voluntarism because it employs institutional analysis. It borders on hypocrisy for the political anarchist to fall back upon the *personal intentions* of his favorite politicians in order to save them from the anarchist curse, when he has traveled merrily down the anarchist road without ever having regarded personal intentions as significant before this point. If an institutional analysis of the State is good enough to get us to anarchism, then it is good enough to get us to voluntarism. Institutional analysis is not a bridge that can be conveniently burned by the political anarchist after he has used it to cross over to anarchism.

It is because of their common acceptance of the anarchist insight that the initial presumption shifts in favor of the voluntarist. The voluntarist and the political anarchist agree that the State is inherently aggressive. From this it follows that anyone who voluntarily joins the State—who campaigns for office, receives a salary, swears allegiance to the State, and so forth—is *at least* highly suspect from an anarchist point of view. There is a presumption, a *prima facie* case, against the political office-holder in anarchist theory (and thus against voting for a political office). The burden then falls not upon the voluntarist to show how this office-holder participates in aggression—for both disputants already agree that the State is inherently aggressive and both accept vicarious liability—but upon the political anarchist to show how his favorite office-holder constitutes a *valid exception* to the general condemnation (the anarchist curse) of the State and its agents.

Anarchists agree that the State is necessarily aggressive, which is why they commonly use terms like “criminal gang” and “ruling class” to describe the State. But anarchists also realize that the State is not a disembodied entity. Institutions are not individuals; they cannot act in any fashion, much less act aggressively. Thus, if the anarchist analysis of the State is to have meaning, it must refer to individuals who work within the structure of the State apparatus. Individuals and their actions, considered within a broader institutional framework (prescribed goals, rules, and procedures), combine to form what anarchists mean by the State. Particular offices within the State, and the individuals who occupy those offices, are assessed according to their importance in directing, supporting, and furthering the institutionalized goals of State power.

It is because anarchists regard the State as inherently aggressive that there exists a presumption among anarchists that anyone who joins the State participates in this aggression. The anarchist curse—the presumption of evil—descends from the condemned institution to the in-

dividuals who are necessary to maintain the life of that institution. The institution is the skeleton, in effect, which requires the flesh and blood of real people to operate. These people are highly suspect in anarchist eyes, even if they do not personally aggress, because they are the components required to translate the institutional aggression of the State into concrete reality.

The anarchist presumption against agents of the State, like all presumptions, is defeasible. It may be that the political anarchist can argue for a valid exception to the general rule. He may be able to explain why we should regard all politicians as members of a criminal gang, except those politicians with “good” (i.e., libertarian) *intentions*. Personal intentions were not previously considered relevant to the anarchist analysis of the State, but the political anarchist may have uncovered new information that will convince his voluntarist colleague. The political anarchist may thus be able to overcome the presumption, the anarchist curse, that makes his case seem initially implausible. (The idea of an “anarchist politician” does seem counter-intuitive at best.)

In our dispute between the voluntarist and the political anarchist, therefore, the presumption is on the side of voluntarism, and the political anarchist assumes the burden of proof. Anarchists of all persuasions have traditionally rejected electoral politics, and with good reason. This seems, after all, to be an essential part of what anarchism *means*. This is why I wrote in *Party Dialogue* (“The Voluntarist Series,” no. 1) that “libertarianism must stand firm against *all* Senators, *all* Presidents, and so forth, because these offices and the legal power they embody are indispensable features of the State apparatus. After all, *what can it possibly mean to oppose the State unless one opposes particular offices and institutions in which State power manifests itself?*”

With the preceding introduction material, we are now able to undertake a systematic analysis of voting. Some of the issues discussed thus far raise problems far too complex to be resolved without further discussion. These will be addressed in more detail in subsequent parts of this essay.

“You cannot serve two masters. You cannot devote yourself to the winning of power, and remain faithful to the great principles. The great principles, and the tactics of the political campaign, can never be made one, never be reconciled. In that region of mental and moral disorder, which we call political life, men must shape their thoughts and actions according to the circumstances of the hour, and in obedience to the tyrant necessity of defeating their rivals. When you strive for power, you may form a temporary, fleeting alliance with the great principles, if they happen to serve your purpose of the moment, but the hour soon comes, as the great conflict enters a new phase, when they will not only cease to be serviceable to you, but are likely to prove highly inconvenient and embarrassing. If you really mean to have and to hold power, you must sit lightly in your saddle, and make and remake your principles with the needs of each new day; for you are as much under the necessity of pleasing and attracting, as those who gain their livelihood in the street.”

Auberon Herbert

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

As Voluntarists we unequivocally condemn the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the criminal acts which resulted. We look to other libertarian organizations, including the Libertarian Party, for similar condemnation of this brutal aggression.

BOOKS OF INTEREST

By Carl Watner

Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973, 3 vols., 902 pp.) (Vol. I—*Power and Struggle*; Vol. II—*The Methods of Nonviolent Action*; Vol. III—*The Dynamics of Nonviolent Action*)

Gene Sharp's studies in the theory and history of non-violent action merit the serious attention of all voluntaryists.

The Politics of Nonviolent Action, as Sharp writes in his preface, is a comprehensive attempt "to examine the nature of nonviolent struggle as a social and political technique, including its view of power, its specific methods of action, its dynamics in conflict and the conditions for success or failure in its use". Nonviolent action is based on the very simple assumption that people do not always do what they are told to do and sometimes do things which they are not supposed to do. Nonviolent action is not inaction, as Sharp stresses; rather it is direct action which is not violent in nature.

The first volume of this trilogy, *Power and Struggle*, is an excellent companion to LaBoetie's essay on *The Discourse of Voluntary Servitude* because Sharp's analysis of the nature and control of political power essentially rests on the voluntaryist insight that political power disintegrates when people withdraw their obedience and support. Sharp's comprehension of this fact is what makes his writings so important to us. He identifies the basic assumption of nonviolent action in the following way: "When people refuse their cooperation, withhold their help and persist in their disobedience and defiance, they are denying their opponent the basic human assistance and cooperation which any government or hierarchical system requires. If they do this in sufficient numbers for long enough, that government or hierarchical system will no longer have power."

Sharp surely does not anticipate the value that anarchists will place on his work. He rightfully criticizes traditional anarchist theorists for not having given sufficient thought to the practical problems of how to achieve a stateless society, but at the same time he is probably unaware of how they might argue against his basic conceptual framework. For the voluntaryist, political action (running candidates for office and electoral voting) is implicitly violent so therefore there can be no such thing as "the politics of nonviolent action". Political power as exercised by all governments monopolizes the provision of defense services in a given area and lives off compulsory levies, known as taxation. Political officeholders exercise jurisdiction over those who voted against them, as well as over those who did not vote at all. Those who do not voluntarily accept their legitimacy to rule or who refuse to voluntarily pay their taxes are threatened with imprisonment and confiscation of their property. This exercise of coercion is what makes government a creature of violence.

Sharp explains that people obey their rulers for a number of various reasons, outlining such considerations as habit, the fear of sanctions, the subject's feeling of a moral obligation to obey, his psychological identification with the ruler, and an absence of self-confidence among the oppressed. He concludes that obedience is essentially voluntary, even though one is threatened with sanctions and reprisals. A man who is ordered to go to prison may refuse and be physically dragged there. Such a man cannot be said to have obeyed. "But if he walks to prison under a command backed by a threat of a sanction, then he in fact consents to the act, although he may

not approve of the command." Despite the penalties for disobedience the choice always does remain: one may choose to resist the State. The implication of Sharp's analysis is that voluntaryists and others who oppose the existence of the state must educate and mobilize sufficient numbers of people into actually withdrawing their consent. Since physical compulsion without the cooperation or sanction of the victim is very limited in what it can achieve, state power must come to a standstill as soon as sufficient numbers of people no longer view it as a legitimate institution.

If one were to look at only one book on nonviolence, *Power and Struggle* would be the volume to choose because Sharp includes a brief review of the major historical actions in which nonviolent struggle has played a successful part. Sharp's writings are valuable to libertarians precisely because they show, in fact, just how much nonviolent action can accomplish and point out many historical cases of nonviolence. Violent action, both in the record of war and political victories, gets plenty of attention, but rarely is the potential of nonviolent action addressed. Nevertheless, the history of nonviolent action can be traced at least as far back as ancient Rome. It is interesting how such activities as boycotts, tax resistance, and ostracism played an important part in the American revolution. During the 19th Century the two most important advocates and practitioners of nonviolence were Henry David Thoreau and Leo Tolstoy. Thoreau, in particular, is important to libertarians because he was intimately connected with the individualist-anarchist and radical abolitionist traditions. Tolstoy, in turn, partly drew upon the thoughts and writings of William Lloyd Garrison, who was a close friend of Thoreau and his circle.

In the 20th Century, undoubtedly Mahatma Gandhi has played the pivotal role in the history of nonviolence. Gandhi, through his Indian religious background and his exposure to Western culture, developed his own unique form of nonviolent resistance, known as Satyagraha, or "Truth Force". The resistance Gandhi wished to offer was that of people who did not fear to be violent, but chose deliberately to be nonviolent and to fight by the power of truth rather than by violence. Gandhi, too, was one of the few theorists to understand the relationship between means and ends; that the ends pre-exist in and are irretrievably influenced by the means we use. Sharp considers Gandhi to be the person who has "made the most significant personal contribution in the history of nonviolent technique with his political experiments in the use of noncooperation, disobedience and defiance to control rulers, alter government policies, and undermine political systems."

Volume II of this series outlines *The Methods of Nonviolent Action* by continuing the historical survey that Sharp began earlier. Rather than taking a chronological approach, as he did in his earlier overview, Sharp categorizes nonviolence techniques into 6 distinct classifications, with many, many subcategories. His major divisions are: 1) the methods of nonviolent protest and persuasion; 2) the methods of social noncooperation; two methods of economic noncooperation; 3) the economic boycott; 4) the strike; 5) the methods of political noncooperation; and finally 6) the methods of nonviolent intervention.

The historical examples that Sharp offers are almost endless and serve as an illustration of how open-ended a technique nonviolent action actually is. It need only be limited by the creativity of its practitioners. Some of the more

interesting and unique instances of its practice include "Lysistratic nonaction" (which refers to the prescription for stopping war contained in Aristophanes' play—that wives should refuse sexual relations with their bellicose husbands.) Sharp documents two historical examples of where this actually occurred. He discusses "withdrawal from social institutions" as an example of a nonviolent technique and points out that many of the Garrisonian abolitionists resorted to this tactic by withdrawing from pro-slavery churches. "Total personal noncooperation" falls under the same general category as the former case since both illustrate methods of social noncooperation. Draft resisters, in particular, have resorted to total noncooperation and have extended their passivity far beyond simply engaging in hunger strikes. Corbett Bishop, a well-known American resister during World War II, literally refused to do anything for his jailers except breathe. He would not eat, dress or undress himself, bathe, or even stand up for them.

Economic boycotts played an important part in the American Revolution, as mentioned and Sharp lists such episodes as the Boston Tea Party as just one case. Revenue refusal or tax resistance as it is commonly known today is discussed at length. One of the more creative techniques Sharp refers to is the refusal to pay one's taxes and then to organize a boycott of any tax auctions in which the government tries to auction off seized and confiscated property. Another technique which should appeal to people oriented towards the free market is to refuse to accept governmental money, despite legal tender laws. Within the general category of political noncooperation, Sharp lists such things as election boycotts, the removal of students from government schools, and the removal of government street signs and numbers. The methods of nonviolent intervention are what might be considered the more traditional forms of civil disobedience, such as the hunger strike, the sit-in and the prayer-in. As types of economic intervention, he mentions the reverse strike (where the strikers do something, as for example build or repair a road, which the government refuses to do), politically motivated counterfeiting, and the creation of alternative markets, transportation systems, and economic institutions.

In Volume III, *The Dynamics of Nonviolent Action*, Sharp examines the operation of nonviolence against a violent and oppressive opponent. What is it that actually makes nonviolence such a powerful tool?, he asks. How and why does nonviolence actually work? In a very important insight, Sharp points out that, in strategy, often the longest way around is the shortest way home. This is true of nonviolent action because it "cuts off the 'sources' of the opponent's power, rather than simply combatting the final" end product. Nonviolence is more direct in the long run because it operates on the voluntaryist insight that political power is grounded on the consent and cooperation of its victims. By attacking tyranny at its roots, it literally uproots the weed of statism. By attacking governmental legitimacy, nonviolent techniques not only minimize bloodshed and loss of life and property, but actually go much farther than traditional violent revolution in demystifying and desanctifying the governmental apparatus. This is why, once a totally stateless society is achieved, it will become vastly more difficult for a state to re-establish itself. Nonviolence assists people in becoming more dependent on themselves and less dependent on any group of so-called "leaders". Any pretender to the throne would not only have to physically overcome a defiant populace but would also have to establish his legitimacy to rule. On the other hand, political activity by anarchists (such as working within the framework

of the Libertarian Party) or the fomenting of violent revolution is not only counterproductive but contrary to the very essence of anarchism. Anarchism will never come about if people have to be coerced into becoming anarchists. Freedom must be brought about by freedom.

Sharp points out that the need for nonviolent behavior "is rooted in the dynamics of the technique of nonviolent action and is not an alien emphasis introduced by moralists or pacifists". Although nonviolence has traditionally been the mainstay of many pacifist and religious groups it has always constituted a means of social struggle. Nonviolence can only achieve its goals if everyone remains committed to the cause. Nonviolent resistance is essentially a matter of spirit. Its strength does not come from physical capacity but rather from the indomitable will of the people. Nonviolence can never know defeat so long as the will of the oppressed is not conquered. Nonviolence further offers several advantages such as winning the sympathy and support of an oppressed population, reducing casualties, inducing dissatisfaction among the opponent's troops, and attracting maximum participation in the nonviolent struggle. One of the great benefits of engaging in nonviolent struggle is that it requires no governmental organization and can be "actively applied by men and women, old and young, city dwellers and rural people, factory workers, intellectuals and farmers, educated and uneducated, able-bodied and the physically weak."

"Political 'jiu-jitsu'", a term originated by Richard Gregg in his much earlier work on *The Power of Nonviolence* (1934), is discussed by Sharp since it plays an important role in the concept of nonviolence. Nonviolent action often meets with violent resistance at the hands of the oppressor and it is this reverse effect of both attracting additional followers to the nonviolence cause and strengthening the will of the resisters, which both Gregg and Sharp refer to as 'jiu-jitsu'. The main mechanisms which produce victory for the nonviolent are identified as "conversion (the rarest), accomodation, and nonviolent coercion". In conversion, one's opponent has been inwardly changed, by either seeing the willingness of the nonviolent resisters to suffer or by their having pointed up the injustice of their circumstances. In accomodation, the opponent decides on a tactical compromise, despite the fact that he could continue the struggle. In what Sharp labels as 'non-violent coercion', the opponent has not changed his mind and wants to continue the struggle, but because he is deprived of the necessary support and cooperation which all governments need, is unable to do so. Thus massive noncooperation has the power not only to cripple and paralyze, but even disintegrate and destroy, the most oppressive of systems.

Despite differences in outlook, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* should be the "bible" of nonviolent activists. It offers Voluntarists a strong lever by which to uproot the idea of statism. It was Benjamin Tucker, the well-known editor of *Liberty* and individualist-anarchist of the late 19th Century, who had the foresight to recognize nonviolence as the tool that Sharp portrays. Tucker wrote that nonviolent resistance was "the most potent weapon ever wielded by man against oppression." "Power feeds on its spoils, and dies when its victims refuse to be despoiled. They can't persuade it to death; they can't vote it to death; they can't shoot it to death; but they can always starve it to death."

NOTE: Besides the three volumes which have been reviewed here, Sharp has published two other books, *Gandhi As A Political Strategist* (1979) and *Social Power and Political Freedom* (1980). These will be reviewed in subsequent issues of this newsletter.

NO COMMENT DEPARTMENT

"Nuking Moscow would mean violating the rights of its inhabitants, but rights are only part of a hierarchy of moral values. When higher values are threatened, the individual rights of Muscovites are literally outvalued. . . Libertarians who are squeamish about this should recall the praise Friedrich Nietzsche lavished on the age that will *wage wars* for the sake of ideas and their consequences. In other words, if the values of a free society mean something to you, they are worth fighting for!"

Thomas John Holton
Frontlines, June 1982

Parker Abel, Texas Libertarian Party candidate for Congressional District 23, maintains in a recent press release that public officials should be hung on courthouse steps if they make statements betraying the Constitution and the

people. When questioned, Abel expanded on this by pointing to politicians who support amnesty for illegal aliens as examples of such public officials. The Texas LP committee meeting of Sept. 11 discussed repudiating Abel's statement but failed to do so.

"FREE TEXAS: What were your general impressions of the Hummel article? ['Can Elected Officials be Consistent Libertarians?']. DICK RANDOLPH: I think that the whole concept of the article is naive. I believe there are at least two parts of libertarianism. There are the philosophical positions that we are coming from and then there is the libertarian political party. I think that much of what was in the article was very appropriate for libertarians and libertarianism but I don't think it was appropriate for a libertarian party. I very bluntly believe that the only real function of a libertarian party is to elect people to office in an attempt to implement both philosophies".

Free Texas, Vol. 11, No. 1, 1982

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