Voluntaryist Resistance

By Carl Watner

[Author’s Introduction of February 2004: This hitherto unpublished essay was first written in January 1983, and then revised in May of that same year. It sat for two decades (receiving only limited private circulation) until it was read by Peter Ragnar of Avalon Mint and Roaring Lion Press. At Peter’s request it was re-edited with a view to posting on the world wide web. The author wishes to thank Alan Koontz (editing of 1983) and Julie Watner (editing of 2004) for their timely assistance in commenting on this essay.]

Introduction

The Voluntaryists are advocates of non-political strategies to achieve a free society. We reject electoral politics, both in theory and 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 cooperation and tacit consent on which State power ultimately depends. Voluntaryists are exclusively committed to using nonviolent strategies to oppose the State. The purpose of this paper is to show why this commitment is a function of voluntaryism and how voluntaryist resistance differs from conventional nonviolence theory.

I. What Is Voluntaryism?

Voluntaryism is a dual doctrine: the beliefs that a) all human interactions should be voluntary; and b) that the State is an inherently coercive institution, and therefore undeserving of any support. The voluntaryist understanding of the relationship between means and ends precludes both the use of electoral politics and violence. 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 cooperation and tacit consent on which State power ultimately depends. Voluntaryists are exclusively committed to using nonviolent strategies to oppose the State. The purpose of this paper is to show why this commitment is a function of voluntaryism and how voluntaryist resistance differs from conventional nonviolence theory.

II. The Voluntaryist Insight

The underlying premise of all voluntaryist thought is an insight into the way political society is organized. It has been expressed by many different thinkers over the course of several centuries. The voluntaryist insight is the understanding that every tyranny must necessarily be grounded upon general popular acceptance. In short, the bulk of the people themselves, for whatever reasons, must acquiesce in their own subjection. All oppression demands the cooperation and compliance of its victims. Oppression cannot operate without the sanction of its victims. This is the essence of all voluntaryist thinking and it is important to grasp this concept of “voluntary servitude” because it forms the foundation of many subsequent arguments. It is the basis for voluntaryist resistance since it demonstrates that governments depend on the consent (willing or unwilling) and cooperation of those they govern. If this consent and cooperation can be withdrawn, then State power must disintegrate.

Gene Sharp has succinctly stated the voluntaryist insight and the implication to be drawn from it:

No government can exist for a single moment without the cooperation of the people, willing or forced, and if the people withdraw their cooperation the government will come to a standstill. Even the most powerful government cannot rule without the cooperation of the ruled. [1]

When people refuse their cooperation, withhold their help, persist in their disobedience and defiance, they are denying their opponent the basic human assistance and cooperation which any government or hierarchical system requires. For they do this in sufficient numbers and for long enough, that government or hierarchical system will no longer have power. This is the basic political assump-
Birth Certificates and the Law

By Carl Watner

“When in the Course of human events” a child is born is it morally proper for the child’s parents to obtain a State-issued birth certificate? Do State birth certificates violate “the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God”? If “all men are created equal,” and “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights,” does the issuance and possession of a government birth certificate allow some children to take advantage of government-granted privileges (which would not otherwise be permitted to them)? In short, does a government birth certificate make some people “more equal” than others? This question obviously leads us to ask: what are the ramifications of not having a birth certificate in a statist world?

While working on my anthology, NATIONAL IDENTIFICATION SYSTEMS: ESSAYS IN OPPOSITION, my wife and I discussed these questions because birth certificates are one of the primary ways in which the State counts and controls its citizens. As the laws are written in most states, it is the obligation of the parents, the attending physician, or the midwife, to “register” the birth of a child with State authorities. Their failure or refusal to do so will possibly make them subject to some sort of criminal penalty for “failure to register a birth.” However, so far as I know, there is no crime in “not having a birth certificate.” In other words, there is no law that operates upon the person who is born to have a birth certificate. The penal sanctions are upon those who witness the birth, not upon the newborn.

In stateless societies birth certificates would generally be a private or religious matter. Parents might choose to make a private or church record of the births of their children, or they may chose to make none at all. Only since the rise of the nation-state in the later Middle Ages has it occurred to anyone that there might be a reason to have governments document human births. In many areas of the world, for many centuries before the official beginning of the United States there was never any requirement that births be registered with the political authorities. Under such circumstances, it was never a crime not to report or register a birth. When it did become a crime, one might have asked: Who has been harmed by not reporting a birth or obtaining a birth certificate for one’s newborn? Failure to report a birth can thus be seen as a violation of a “political” statute, but it is clearly not a “real” crime. It is certainly not a crime against God’s law or Nature’s Law not to have a birth certificate, and that being the case, it certainly cannot be a real crime to fail to report the birth to the political authorities.

What happens when the parents of a newborn apply for a birth certificate? What is the moral propriety of a parent or guardian obtaining a state-issued birth certificate for a minor? Does getting a birth certificate violate any of God’s laws or Nature’s laws? My answer would be: “Yes.” Which ones, you might ask? For starters, try Commandment One: “Thou shalt have no other Gods.” What is your country’s government trying to do when it requires that every birth be registered? It is playing God, demanding that each citizen bow before the State. Possession of a birth certificate is a prerequisite to receiving any sort of privilege from the State: whether it be a driver’s license, marriage license, contractor’s license, etc. (I might add that none of these licenses are inherently necessary to the activities which they authorize. One can competently drive, marry, and build without a license from the State.)

In short, the birth certificate is the basis for the state’s monopolization of identification. It is literally “a license to live,” issued by the government. The birth certificate is an attack on every person’s right to exist anywhere in the universe. Without a government birth certificate, one encounters difficulty in leaving and returning to one’s country of origin. A person without a birth certificate will ultimately be seized by government authorities for violating their laws concerning personal identification. A parent by complying with State laws governing birth certificates is trying to play God with his infant’s life, by putting the child on the altar of the State. The birth certificate labels the infant as a member of a national group whose members are subject to paying taxes and to the military draft.

Are we “owned” by the State or is each individual a self-owner? Isn’t everyone “endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights”? Or do children need to be registered with the government of their native country in order to “legally” exist and receive whatever privileges and benefits that government concedes to grant them? Isn’t the birth certificate really a badge of slavery?

Parents by your actions, you make this choice for your children. \[\text{\textcopyright 2nd Quarter 2005} \]
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tion of nonviolent action. [2]

In effect then, voluntaryists are arguing that all
power ultimately derives from consent, whether it
be willingly given or based on reluctant compliance
or that derived from strict enforcement of govern-
mental law. This can be summed up by saying “that
all rule is permitted by the ruled.” [3]

III. The Means-End Insight

The question of means and ends plays a very sig-
nificant part in voluntaryist thinking. In conjunction
with the voluntaryist insight it provides the justifi-
cation of our nonviolent, nonelectoral approach to
social change. It is nearly impossible to understand
voluntaryist resistance without comprehending our
vision of means and ends.

There are two important aspects of the means-
end insight: the first dealing with the question of
means and the second with the end. With regard to
the means, it is a common observation that the means
one uses must be consistent with the goal one seeks.
It is impossible in the nature of things to wage a war
for peace or to fight politics by becoming political.
“There is a great mystery concealed in the fact that
the means are more important than the ends.”
Gandhi, perhaps the greatest exponent of nonviolent
resistance, grasped this fact. He exemplified his po-
position by stating: “If ones takes care of the means,
the end will take care of itself.” [4]

They say that means are after all means.
I would say that means are after all every-
thing. As the means, so the end. There is no
wall of separation between means and ends.
We have limited control over means, and some
over the ends. Realization of the goal is in
exact proportion to that of the means. This is
a proposition that admits of no exceptions. ...
Our progress towards the goal is always in
exact proportion to the purity of our means.
This method may appear to be long, perhaps
too long, but I am convinced it is the shortest.
[5]

What Gandhi is saying to us is that we live in the
here and now. The only way we can approach the
future is through the present. So the means we adopt
and use must inevitably influence the ends we event-
ually achieve. The only things we have to work with
are in fact the means. So it is critically important
that the means be kept pure if the ends are to be so.

This means-end insight sheds some very inter-
esting light on the question of gradualism vs.
immediatism. For one thing, it leads to the con-
clusion that one must take action now in order to even-
tually reach a stateless society. This implies that in
fact there is no transition period, or what in fact
amounts to the same thing, that every period is one
of transition. The important thing for voluntaryists
to do is to make a serious attempt to travel in the
direction of a stateless society and not be concerned
with its imminent arrival. This can only be done by
people behaving now in a manner consistent with
their ultimate ideal. The idea of an all voluntary so-
ciety is as much of a guide to present activity as it is
a future ideal. This is what is meant by saying that
the means are the ends in process.

The second aspect of the means-end insight deals
with the question of the end sought. All anarchists
share a like goal: the abolition of the State. This goal
is based on their commonly shared understanding
that all government, by its very nature, is invasive.
What distinguishes voluntaryists from all other an-
archists is that voluntaryist goals do not stop with
the elimination of government. We could still have a
society full of violence, even though there was no gov-
ernment. Human beings require an orderly society.
(One must question the assumption that govern-
ments provide such an environment.) However, po-
itical law and government coercion are not the only
way to provide for a peaceable existence. [6] Volun-
taryists want an all voluntary society, one in which
interpersonal relationships are based on mutually
agreeable and voluntary exchanges. This is the end
of voluntaryism: a regime of peaceful relationships
based on respect for self-ownership and proprietary
justice. It is this peaceful end which leads us to em-
brace nonviolence as a means.

IV. The Nonviolent Insight

All libertarians and voluntaryists recognize the
right of self-defense, which entails the right to pre-
serve one’s self and property with whatever force is
reasonably necessary against actual violence or its
threat. This right to use force against aggressors
stems from our self-ownership rights in our own bod-
ies and justly owned property. Violence, however, is
just one form of resistance, which allows us to op-
pose, defeat, and attempt to frustrate those who vi-
olate our rights.

The nonviolent insight calls attention to the fact
that we may resist both violently and nonviolently
in self-defense. “Whether one uses violent or nonvio-
 lent resistance in self-defense depends on the nature
of the aggressor.”

Voluntaryists are not pacifists since they recog-
nize the right of the individual to use violence in self-
defense. Yet, they are often accused of offering a
double standard because they advocate nonviolent
resistance against the State, on the one hand, and
allow for the use of violence against the common
criminal. Isn’t the State itself nothing but a common
criminal, and therefore aren’t those who have their
rights violated by the State justified in reacting vio-
ently? Such critics misperceive the true nature of
the State. The State can only be identified by its in-
istitutional features which render it invasive ‘per se’.
This is what distinguishes State aggression from
common criminality. “Violence may be directed at
individuals, but when it comes to the State where is the violence to be directed?” Institutional arrangements can never be touched by violence because they are ideas carried in the minds of people practicing them. Public buildings may be destroyed, public officials murdered, but such efforts will never bring about the destruction of the idea of the State. The State is a state of mind, an idea which cannot be harmed by violence. Ideas can only be attacked with better ideas. Therefore, there is no double standard involved when voluntaryists urge the use of nonviolent resistance against the State. The individual criminal is a real person while the State is an idea, an institutional arrangement. One does not go about extirpating the State in the same way that one defends one’s self from a common criminal. [7]

“If a nation is capable of finding amongst its ranks of people 5 per cent willing to go voluntarily to prison for a cause they consider just, then no obstacles will stand in their way.”
—attributed to Martin Luther King

Some anarchists and libertarians argue that the use of force, as in the American Revolutionary War, is justified. Voluntaryists have no qualms about the use of force in self-defense, but since they see State control as essentially an issue of legitimacy, they ask: “How can the idea of legitimacy be attacked with force?” It is possible, although most present governments have armaments and military weapons far superior to those available to the insurgents, that we might rid ourselves of a particular government by resorting to violence. Yet, even if a small, powerful minority were successful in abolishing such a government by violence, how would this affect the larger majority of people who still believed in the legitimacy of the State? State legitimacy will only be destroyed when sufficient numbers of people come to view government actions in the same moral light as that of the individual. If this moral leveling is not brought about, if this delegitimization is not accomplished, then violent revolution must inevitably fail, even if it were successful in battle. The destruction of State legitimacy must precede the advent of violent revolution, and when that has occurred, violent revolution will be unnecessary. Under any other circumstances, violent revolution will only result in the replacement of one government for another. [8]

Voluntaryists also reject the use of electoral means as the course of changing society. Electoral politics only serves to reinforce State legitimacy. Political parties and their attempts to campaign for and hold State offices are all inconsistent with the final end of a nonpolitical society. Voting, running for office, or holding office are all counter-productive to the voluntaryist goal of delegitimating the State. (Furthermore, there are profound questions of personal integrity involved in collecting a government salary or swearing an oath to a government constitution.) All such efforts to wield political power are an attempt to exercise power over other people. It is precisely for this reason that voluntaryists do not view electoral politics as a form of nonviolent action.

Nonviolent strategies serve to unite the means with the end because it is only by adherence to nonviolence in practice that we can show the State to be the invasive institution that it actually is. If voluntaryists use violence, then the issue of legitimacy becomes lost because the State can argue that it is defending itself from attack. However, if we take a totally nonviolent stance, the State is either forced to ignore us or to use violent means to throw us in jail or punish us. Either way voluntarism wins. That is the beauty of nonviolent resistance. By relying on nonviolence, the general public is encouraged to see the State’s actions as violent and aggressive. (This is something that many of them are unable to comprehend from our theoretical arguments, but when they see armed men attacking people who offer no violent resistance in return, there is no question about who is the aggressor and who are the innocents.) On the other hand, if the State tries to ignore our resistance, the public at large must inevitably be encouraged by our success and will eventually conclude that they, too, can ignore the State without any danger. Should the State try to counter voluntaryist resistance with nonviolent tactics of its own, so much the better. Danger to the resisters will be minimized and the public still emboldened. Voluntaryists, by initiating nonviolent resistance, should always be able to counter with more sophisticated forms of nonviolence.

V. Voluntaryist Resistance

Voluntaryist resistance rests on an epistemological rejection of violence. William Godwin, the father of anarchism, stated this quite clearly. Consider, he said, the effect of coercion. It cannot convince, it is no argument. The resort to violence is the tacit confession of imbecility, for one who employs it against someone else would no doubt convince them of their arguments if they could. They use violence because their arguments are weak. In resorting to violence, one is unconsciously agreeing that violence is the surest way of settling conflicts. It certainly is not. Violence and the threat of violence can never solve any of our basic human problems. Nothing permanent was ever solved by violence. Voluntaryist resistance is essentially a persuasive process, which maintains an epistemological bias against violence.

Violent revolution can destroy old institutions before people are ready for new ones. Voluntaryist resistance, because it rests on nonviolence, cannot do this. People will only accept nonviolent resistance as they are ready for it. Voluntaryist resistance allows people to proceed at their own pace, allows resistance to mount as educational activities enlighten people as to their “voluntary servitude”. Voluntaryist resistance builds self-confidence and is a real tool
of empowerment because people realize that they can shape the course of their lives and alter long-lived institutions.

Gene Sharp defines “nonviolent action” as those methods of protest, resistance, and intervention without physical violence, in which members of the nonviolent group do or refuse to do certain things. Voluntaryist resistance may simply be described as extending the implications of the voluntaryist insight into nonviolent action.

Voluntaryist resistance, like Gandhian Satyagraha, is essentially a matter of the will. Strength does not come from physical capacity, rather it comes from an indomitable will to resist. Such purposefulness can only come from an inner conviction that one’s position is just. Voluntaryist resistance is less a matter of repelling violence than of enlightening deceived subjects. It is inculcating a mental and moral opposition to tyranny in one’s self and others.

One might argue that voluntaryist resistance requires a greater degree of courage than the resort to violence. Voluntaryist resistance is a manifestation of both inner and outer strength. Gandhi expressed this well when he wrote:

Nonviolence does not mean meek submission to the will of the evil doer, but rather the pitting of one’s whole soul against the will of the tyrant. Nonviolence is not of the weak but of the strong. [9]

The goal of voluntaryist resistance is to abolish the political power structure and its success or failure in obtaining that objective rests squarely on the degree to which its strategy succeeds in delegitimizing the State, and in inducing people to withdraw their support from the government. Its major strategies rest on education (which heightens public awareness of the evils of the State) and in persuading large numbers of persons to refuse to cooperate with the government. The particular tactics of voluntaryist resistance seek to create situations that crystallize public opinion — that “involve” it — and which “direct” it against the government. Voluntaryists must structure the conflict situation with the government in such a manner that the government becomes responsible for the resulting actions. Mass non-cooperation and widespread civil disobedience present a “resist or abdicate” dilemma to the government. In resisting voluntaryist demands, the government becomes responsible for its own repressive acts. In abdicating, the government not only loses face but political power.

Thus, the one key ingredient of voluntaryist resistance is the adherence to a strict policy of nonviolence, even in the face of the utmost government brutality. Governments will want to provoke nonviolent resisters to violence in order to justify their own severe repression. However, if the resisters remain true to their nonviolence, the government is faced with another dilemma, that of explaining its own violence and coercion. “This explains the tendency of all government when faced with nonviolent resistance to emphasize any violent fringes that may emerge.” Only by holding fast to nonviolence can public opinion be brought around to the side of the voluntaryist. Voluntaryist strategy remains the same regardless of the totalitarian nature of the government it faces because it is based on fundamental insights into the nature of political power. Voluntaryist resistance seeks to rob the State of the public support and cooperation on which its power ultimately depends. It aims at attracting the sympathy and support of those third parties who tacitly support the State. It does not depend on converting members of the ruling class or the bureaucracy, nor is it dependent on the particular form or structure of political power. “The only aid a democratic framework provides, vs. a totalitarian, is to make the process easier, or at least safer for the resister.” [10]

Public opinion, particularly among libertarians, must be cultivated so that many people come to understand their own potential for undermining State power. “Even a power that a particular moment in time may seem invincible” should be viewed as vulnerable. [11] The creation of this realization must spread among large numbers of people, who in turn, engage in collective actions based on voluntaryist strategies. This in turn requires careful organization, training, and adherence to the discipline of nonviolence. Voluntaryists are dedicated to developing the educational programs, and inculcating the will and solidarity necessary for mass corporate resistance.

Group resistance overcomes the weakness of the individual when confronted by the State. Both the quality and quantity of the resisters is important. Numbers are important because it lessens the chance that any one person will be punished or singled out when they act in concert with a large group of people. Secondly, the more resisters, the fewer available to enforce the ruler’s will. Thirdly, large numbers of resisters lends credibility to one’s position because it demonstrates potential power and indicates the fact that many people see the rightness of the resisters’ position. There are numerous ways that corporate resistance can be focused in order to confront the State at its weakest points, but one must understand that even large numbers of resisters are no guarantee of success. Numbers are no substitute for dedication and loyalty to means and ends. Voluntaryist resistance involves danger for both the individual resister and the group because it involves tension and creative conflict. The chance always remains that one may die for one’s cause. As Martin Luther King put it, “One must be prepared to die, before one can begin to live.” [12]

VI. Systemic Revolution and the Lessons of History

Voluntaryism is essentially a subversive philoso-
Voluntaryist resistance serves to veto the actions of those in political power by engineering the withdrawal of support. Voluntaryists realize that systemic revolution grows out of the disintegration of consent and not violence. Voluntaryist resistance is essentially a control over power rather than a form of power; “a technique that is limited to limiting and destroying power,” not a new group of people coming into power. [13] If the State can be used to remove our fetters, then it can be used to replace them. Voluntaryist resistance is much less likely to bring about tyranny and oppression in its wake because voluntaryists do not seek power in order to reform it. They renounce power in order to abolish it and thereby attempt to harmonize the means with the end.

While past history cannot tell us for sure whether a voluntaryist movement will be successful, we do have the benefit of learning from history. It is possible that a new State may arise in the wake of a nonviolent revolution, but if history teaches us anything, it is that every revolution effected by force sooner or later ends up re-establishing the tyranny it undertook to overthrow. Every ideology that has sought to master the State through violence has in the end become its servant. Violent revolutions invariably end up increasing centralization and statism. Under any circumstances voluntaryist resistance could hardly fare worse.

**ENDNOTES**


7 “Great part of that order which reigns among mankind is not the effect of Government. It has its origins in the principles of society and the natural constitution of man. It existed prior to Government, and would exist if the formality of Government was abolished.” [Thomas Paine, RIGHTS OF MAN (1792), Ch. 1, Bk. 2.]
premise. The underlying foundation is that every act, every decision is voluntary. No one can force another person into slavery or servitude unless that person chooses to be a slave or servant. Likewise freedom is voluntary as well. No one can force you to change your mind or relinquish a position unless you volunteer to do so. Neither steel bars nor iron chains can imprison your mind. Only you can do that by failing to reason and by failing to listen to the dictates of your own heart and conscience.

So am I a voluntaryist? I wasn’t then, but I am now because I realize that my presence in court many decades ago was voluntary. Even had I been ordered to report for induction, I would have refused rather than endure the pain of violating my own conscience. I became a voluntaryist the day I fully realized no one could force me to do anything I did not want to do. I became a voluntaryist the day I fully realized I am responsible for the consequences of any decision I make. I became a voluntaryist the day I realized I was self-owned: that I own myself; that I own my mind; that I own my life.

When Alexander the Great was about to cross the Ganges River in India, he met an old sage. As Alexander questioned the sage about what he was to do when he crossed the river with his army, the sage’s answer shocked him. It is said the old man looked Alexander straight in the eye and replied, "You’ll never be able to conquer them." "What! I'm Alexander the Great! I've got the power of the world's greatest army behind me. Do you realize this very moment I have the power to cut your head off? Then what would you do?" Unflinchingly the old man said, "Well, then I suppose we would both watch it fall, wouldn't we?" Alexander, changing his tone, asked "So why is it you believe those people can't be conquered?" The wise man, looking Alexander through, retorted, "Because they don't love money and they don't fear death!" It is said that at that point Alexander the Great turned his armies around. Of course, I might have added, "And what is it about 'No' that you don't understand?"

Physical freedom can be curtailed by force but coercion can never buy willing acquiescence. No victory requires the use of power and force. The only victories ever won are in the hearts and minds of individuals. All power, contrary to common consensus, lies in the individual's voluntary 'Yes' or 'No.' You can chop people's fingers off so they cannot write. Then you will have to cut their tongues out of their mouths so they cannot speak. But ultimately you will have to cauterize their brains so they cannot think. At that point you will have to find and extinguish their spirit so they cannot exist. And what will you have won?

Pyrrhic victories are never victories at all. What cost is to be paid to silence another? It was while reading Carl Watner’s collection of essays, I MUST SPEAK OUT, that I became duly impressed with the profound concept of voluntary behavior. I might be killed but I can never be forced against my will. It is only fools and politicians who attempt to live their lives by controlling others. Everything we do is voluntary no matter what the cost. The only question remaining is, where to draw the line in the sand? And only reason and conscience can dictate that.

How far can one be pushed, how many cherished beliefs trampled upon, how many values assaulted, before the steel in one’s spine stiffens? I don’t know. Everyone is different. One day, that skinny-armed boy becomes a man with bulging biceps due to the resistance he finds in the gym. One day also comes when that young man forges and builds his philosophical edifice as his ideas, beliefs and values are tested. Testing and resistance are food for developing noble characters and the stalwart qualities that we admire in heroic men and women. Like iron filings are attracted to a magnet, men and women of purpose are drawn to high ideals. So, most naturally I was drawn to the work of Carl Watner. It is often a matter of integrity to speak out, which I did in that courtroom four decades ago. You probably now understand that as a voluntaryist, I, too, must speak out, as will some day millions of others. "This above all—to thine own self be true, And it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man." [v]
“So, What Is It About ‘No’ That You Don’t Understand...?”

By Peter Ragnar

Of course, I didn’t know it at the time. Nor did I clearly understand the premise behind my behavior. Nevertheless my heart was ablaze and my bones were on fire. Even the icy wind was unnoticed as I entered the Federal courthouse that February morning in the early 1960s. I had no lawyer. I had been fighting for six long years and this was the final showdown. Would I be sent to prison for the next five years of my young life?

As the Federal judge spoke, I stood quietly in luminous rays of sunlight flowing through the windows. Looking upwards towards the bench of justice, I gazed at the motes of dust floating on the shafts of light. While at times you can be made to feel as insignificant as a microscopic dust mote, you are still empowered; you can say ‘No,’ even if that’s all you can do. Sensing he didn’t seem to have my full attention, the judge attempted to sound as if he were giving a pronouncement of one of the Ten Commandments.

“Thou shalt not resist induction into the United States military!”

Well, at least that’s the impression he was trying to convey. What he did say was, “I’ve sent many a person like you to prison, and you wouldn’t be the last! Do you have anything to say for yourself?” I offered my hands as if bound by the court. “You may be able to bind me, you may be able to confine me, you may be able to burn me with fire, you may be able to drown me in water or blood. You may be able to hack me to pieces and feed me to the lions, but coercion can never buy my compliance! Just what part of ‘No’ do you have a difficulty understanding?”

Oddly, the courtroom audience cheered. The judge slammed the gavel repeatedly like a nasty child throwing a temper tantrum. “One more outburst like that and I’ll clear this courtroom!” Looking now even less friendly he glared at me and stated, “I’m not on trial here, you are!” Figuring I was already going to prison and that my last words would earn me an additional contempt charge, I knew I must speak out. The words came out of my mouth like football players from a locker room at the Superbowl. “No! Your Honor, you are on trial in a higher court. Your integrity is on trial! Your honesty is on trial! Your fairness is on trial! You as a human being will be judged this day no matter what happens to me. I am unrepen tant in resisting the draft. Now you must be unbiased when you judge my honesty.”

The judge called for a short recess. When he returned, his countenance appeared changed. This time he spoke softly. “I can’t agree with your position. However, I do agree that you deserve a re-classification as a conscientious objector. You are free to go.”

As I said to start with, I didn’t clearly see the continued on page 7