
The Voluntaryist

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A Voluntaryist Bibliography

By Carl Watner

[Editor's Note: This essay first appeared in 1982 as No. IV in THE VOLUNTARYIST SERIES, and was reprinted in NEITHER BULLETS NOR BALLOTS in December 1983.]

The Voluntaryists are a newly formed group of libertarians who have organized to promote non-political strategies to achieve a free society. We have chosen to label ourselves Voluntaryists because the term “libertarian” has become too closely associated with the Libertarian Party. We believe that all efforts to elect libertarians to political office conflict with libertarian principles and that such efforts are strategically unsound. Engaging in political action, running candidates for office, and encouraging people to vote must inevitably sabotage the Voluntaryist goal of delegitimizing the State. The only long-range and lasting way to curtail State power is to dissolve the illusion of legitimacy which all States must have in order to sustain themselves. Libertarians must come to act consistently with the Voluntaryist insight: that all State power ultimately depends on the sanction and cooperation of its victims.

The Voluntaryist insight, that all State power is grounded on general popular acceptance, was first formulated by Etienne de la Boetie (1530-1563). In his Discourse on Voluntary Servitude, which was probably written during the 1550's, la Boetie discussed one of the most critical problems of political philosophy; namely, the question of civil obedience. “Why in the world do people consent to their own enslavement?” he asked. “Why do the bulk of the people acquiesce in their own subjection?” La Boetie answered these questions by explaining the governmental mystique created by the rulers and their intellectual apologists. By relying on custom, by providing both bread and circuses to the citizenry, and by creating a vast network of governmental supporters dependent on political plunder, governments were able to engineer and sustain their own popular acceptance among the populace.

La Boetie was also the first political philosopher to move from an emphasis on the importance of consent to the strategic question of toppling tyranny by leading the public to withdraw their consent. He saw that violence was not necessary: “Obviously there is no need of fighting to overcome the tyrant, for he is automatically defeated if the country refuses to consent to its own enslavement: it is not necessary to

deprive him of anything, but simply to give him nothing; ... it is therefore the inhabitants themselves who permit, or, rather, bring about, their own subjection, since by ceasing to submit, they would put an end to their servitude”(p. 50). Realizing the great value of natural liberty, la Boetie called for a thorough process of educating the public to the truth, a process which would give back to the people a knowledge of the the myths and illusions fostered by the State. The primary task of the opponents of State power is therefore an educational one: to alert the public to their despotic condition and then to demystify and desanctify the entire State apparatus.

There are two English language editions of la Boetie's essay readily available. The best, and the one quoted from above, was prepared by Free Life Editions of New York in 1975 with the title of The Politics of Obedience: The Discourse of Voluntary Servitude. Despite his advocacy of libertarian political activity, Murray Rothbard's introduction for this edition, “The Political Thought of Etienne de la Boetie,” gives a great deal of support to the Voluntaryist critique of political action. Political activity not only unnecessarily reinforces the image of State legitimacy, which, as la Boetie points out, we must destroy, but it is also unlikely to end State power. La Boetie's analysis implies that educational activities and non-violent resistance to the State (such as occurred in India during the Gandhian campaigns against the British) are sufficient to topple States. The other edition of The Discourse was prepared by William Flygare and is accompanied by a preface from James Martin. It is titled The Will to Bondage (Colorado Springs: Ralph Myles Publisher, 1974). Included is the original French version of the essay, alongside the first English translation, which was prepared in 1735. The Free Life edition carries a 1942 translation, so it is worthwhile to compare the two.

There is not a great deal of secondary material concerning la Boetie and his Discourse in English. The two best general discussions have been prepared by Nannerl O. Keohane and James Brown Scott. Scott includes a chapter entitled “Le Contr 'Un de la Boetie – Tyrannicide through the Ages” in his The Catholic Conception of International Law (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1934). La Boetie's essay is treated as part of the historical tradition of tyrannicide. Scott refers to it as “a literary exercise in behalf of liberty in which he [la Boetie] condemns tyranny in any and all of its forms as ruinous alike to

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Sociopaths and the American Polity

By Doug Casey

Any intelligent observer [who] surveys the world's economic and political landscape, ... has to be disturbed – even dismayed and a bit frightened – by the gravity and number of problems that mark the horizon. We're confronted by economic depression, looming financial chaos, serious currency inflation, onerous taxation, crippling regulation, a developing police state, and, worst of all, the prospect of a major war. It seems almost unbelievable that all these things could affect the U.S., which historically has been the land of the free.

How did we get here? An argument can be made that things went bad because of miscalculation, accident, inattention, and the like. Those elements have had a role, but it is minor. Potential catastrophe across the board can't be the result of happenstance. When things go wrong on a grand scale, it's not just bad luck or inadvertence. It's because of serious character flaws in one or many – or even all – of the players.

So is there a root cause of all the problems I've cited? If we can find it, it may tell us how we personally can best respond to the problems.

In this article, I'm going to argue that the U.S. government, in particular, has been overrun by the wrong kind of person. It's a trend that's been in motion for many years but has now reached a point of no return. In other words, a type of moral rot has become so prevalent that it's institutional in nature. There is not going to be, therefore, any serious change in the direction in which the U.S. is headed until a genuine crisis topples the existing order. Until then, the trend will accelerate.

The reason is that a certain class of people – sociopaths – are now fully in control of major American institutions. Their beliefs and attitudes are insinuated throughout the economic, political, intellectual, and psychological/spiritual fabric of the U.S.

What does this mean to you, as an individual? It depends on your character. Are you the kind of person who supports "my country, right or wrong," as did most Germans in the 1930s and 1940s? Or the kind

who dodges the duty to be a helpmate to murderers? The type of passenger who goes down with the ship? Or the type who puts on his vest and looks for a lifeboat? The type of individual who supports the merchants who offer the fairest deal? Or the type who is gulled by splashy TV commercials?

What the ascendancy of sociopaths means isn't an academic question. Throughout history, the question has been a matter of life and death. That's one reason America grew; every American (or any ex-colonial) has forebears who confronted the issue and decided to uproot themselves to go somewhere with better prospects. The losers were those who delayed thinking about the question until the last minute.

I have often described myself, and those I prefer to associate with, as gamma rats. You may recall the ethologist's characterization of the social interaction of rats as being between a few alpha rats and many beta rats, the alpha rats being dominant and the beta rats submissive. In addition, a small percentage are gamma rats that stake out prime territory and mates, like the alphas, but are not interested in dominating the betas. The people most inclined to leave for the wide world outside and seek fortune elsewhere are typically gamma personalities.

You may be thinking that what happened in places like Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, Mao's China, Pol Pot's Cambodia, and scores of other countries in recent history could not, for some reason, happen in the U.S.. Actually, there's no reason it won't at this point. All the institutions that made America exceptional – including a belief in capitalism, individualism, self-reliance, and the restraints of the Constitution – are now only historical artifacts.

On the other hand, the distribution of sociopaths is completely uniform across both space and time. Per capita, there were no more evil people in Stalin's Russia, Hitler's Germany, Mao's China, Amin's Uganda, Ceausescu's Romania, or Pol Pot's Cambodia than there are today in the U.S. All you need is favorable conditions for them to bloom, much as mushrooms do after a rainstorm.

Conditions for them in the U.S. are becoming quite favorable. Have you ever wondered where the 50,000 people employed by the TSA to inspect and degrade you came from? Most of them are middle-aged. Did they have jobs before they started doing something that any normal person would consider demeaning? Most did, but they were attracted to – not repelled by – a job where they wear a costume and abuse their fellow citizens all day.

Few of them can imagine that they're shepherding in a police state as they play their roles in security theater. (A reinforced door on the pilots' cabin is probably all that's actually needed, although the most effective solution would be to hold each airline responsible for its own security and for the harm done

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if it fails to protect passengers and third parties.) But the 50,000 newly employed are exactly the same type of people who joined the Gestapo – eager to help in the project of controlling everyone. Nobody was drafted into the Gestapo.

What's going on here is an instance of Pareto's Law. That's the 80-20 rule that tells us, for example, that 80% of your sales come from 20% of your salesmen or that 20% of the population are responsible for 80% of the crime.

As I see it, 80% of people are basically decent; their basic instincts are to live by the Boy Scout virtues. 20% of people, however, are what you might call potential trouble sources, inclined toward doing the wrong thing when the opportunity presents itself. They might now be shoe clerks, mailmen, or waitresses – they seem perfectly benign in normal times. They play baseball on weekends and pet the family dog. However, given the chance, they will sign up for the Gestapo, the Stasi, the KGB, the TSA, Homeland Security, or whatever. Many seem well intentioned, but are likely to favor force as the solution to any problem.

But it doesn't end there, because 20% of that 20% are really bad actors. They are drawn to government and other positions where they can work their will on other people and, because they're enthusiastic about government, they rise to leadership positions. They remake the culture of the organizations they run in their own image. Gradually, non-sociopaths can no longer stand being there. They leave. Soon the whole barrel is full of bad apples. That's what's happening today in the U.S.

It's a pity that Bush, when he was in office, made such a big deal of evil. He discredited the concept. He made *Boobus americanus* think it only existed in a distant axis, in places like North Korea, Iraq and Iran, which were and still are irrelevant backwaters and arbitrarily chosen enemies. Bush trivialized the concept of evil and made it seem banal because he was such a fool. All the while, real evil, very immediate and powerful, was growing right around him, and he lacked the awareness to see he was fertilizing it by turning the U.S. into a national security state after 9/11.

Now, I believe, it's out of control. The U.S. is already in a truly major depression and on the edge of financial chaos and a currency meltdown. The sociopaths in government will react by redoubling the pace toward a police state domestically and starting a major war abroad. To me, this is completely predictable. It's what sociopaths do.

[Excerpted from Doug Casey's INTERNATIONAL MAN, "The New American Nightmare," February 14, 2019. Permission granted by John Hunt, MD, email of March 3, 2019, 8:03 AM. The original article appeared at internationalman.com/articles/the-new-american-nightmare/.]



the tyrant, the state, and the people" (p.299). He aptly summarizes la Boetie's position: "He does not require of the people that they shall violently overthrow the tyrant, but merely that they shall cease to support him, whereupon he will fall of his own dead weight" (p.302). Keohane's discussion of la Boetie originally appeared as "The Radical Humanism of Etienne de la Boetie" (38 Journal of the History of Ideas, Jan. – March, 1977, pp. 119-130) and then was condensed for his book, *Philosophy and the State in France: The Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) as "On Voluntary Servitude: La Boetie" (pp. 92-98). Keohane places la Boetie in the historical perspective of 16th Century France by pointing out that la Boetie was both a lawyer and member of parliament. Despite his place in the State apparatus, Keohane regards la Boetie's premises as basically anarchistic, because they lead to the conclusion that no man or group of men should have authority over other individuals.

In his newly published *The Ethics of Liberty* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1982), Murray Rothbard devotes some space to the Voluntaryist insight in his chapter on "The Nature of the State." The latter half of this chapter deals explicitly with la Boetie and generally discusses the significance of State legitimacy. Rothbard shows how the State has historically aligned itself with the Church, and that when this became no longer possible, how the State assumed control over public education. The State is thus able to "mould the minds of its subjects" from kindergarten to graduate school in order to foster this voluntary servitude. In a footnote Rothbard cites two other disparate thinkers who have understood the importance of majority consent to governmental tyranny. He quotes from David Hume's essay "On the First Principles of Government" (see any edition of David Hume, *Essays, Literary, Moral and Political*). Hume, who was no libertarian wrote: "Nothing appears more surprising ... than the easiness with which the many are governed by the few, and the implicit submission with which men resign their own sentiments ... to those of their rulers. ... [W]e shall find that, as 'force' is always on the side of the governed, the governors have nothing to support them but opinion. It is, therefore, on opinion only that government is founded; Rothbard also cites Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949, p. 188ff).

The Voluntaryist insight and the general non-political approach to social change which it suggests has a long standing place in the libertarian tradition. For a general discussion see *Voluntaryism in the Libertarian Tradition* (Baltimore: The Voluntaryist, 1982) by Carl Watner. Any late 19th Century encyclopedia should have an entry under "Voluntaryism," since the term originated back in the early 1820s when it was used in

the religious disputes between established churchmen in England and the dissenters. Typical of such articles is the one found in Chambers' Encyclopedia at Volume 10, page 23 (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott and Co., 1882). During the 1830s and until the 1850s, the term Voluntaryism was applied to the advocates of private schools in England. These voluntary educationists saw a religious threat in State controlled education and many believed that the law of supply and demand, or the voluntary principle, as they termed it, would provide for the education of the whole English people. Edward Miall, a well-known publisher and dissenter wrote a book, entitled Views of the Voluntary Principle (London: Aylott and Jones, 1845) which characterized the meaning of Voluntaryism for mid-19th Century England.

Auberon Herbert attempted to repopularize the term Voluntaryism during the 1880s and 1890s in his voluntaryist journal Free Life. Herbert was a supporter of voluntary taxation and one of the last projects of his life was the preparation and publication of "A Plea for Voluntaryism" which appeared in The Voluntaryist Creed (Oxford, 1908). Both the "Plea" and "The Principles of Voluntaryism and Free Life" by an American supporter of Herbert have been re-printed in Eric Mack's collection The Right and Wrong of State Compulsion and Other Essays by Auberon Herbert (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1978).

Another classical example of Voluntaryism at work in England is to be found in William Godwin's Enquiry Concerning Political Justice which first appeared in 1793. The best introduction to Godwin is found in the 1946 reprint edition by F.E.L. Priestley (Toronto: University of Toronto Press.) Godwin believed that physical force was too uncertain in its results and that peaceful resistance to tyrannical government was more desirable and effective. Godwin argued for reasonable discussion and disciplined non-cooperation as the means of fighting authority. In Book II, Chapter III, and Book IV, Chapter I, he urged that, "All government is founded on opinion. Men at present live under any particular form, because they conceive it their interest to so do. ...Destroy this opinion, and the fabric which is built upon it falls to the ground." "Make men wise, and by that very operation you make them free. Civil liberty follows as a consequence of this; no usurped power can stand against the artillery of opinion."

Godwin, in one important particular, was at variance with the main tradition of dissent in the 18th Century. A large body of dissenters thought in terms of politics; they tended to see problems as political and to seek political solutions. They favored associations and the normal methods of bringing political pressure to bear; they looked to legislative action for a solution of problems. Godwin, on the other hand, looked only to the reformation of the individual, objected to political parties, and had no faith in political solutions of what were for him

simply moral problems. The voluntaryist dissenters believed that moral agitation was always more effective and more proper than political activity.

The 19th Century abolitionists both in England and the United States, struggling to abolish slavery and the slave trade, were faced with similar problems. Was slave-holding to be abolished by moral suasion or political means? Should abolitionists participate in party politics or should they hold aloof from such controversies? Should they create their own organizations to propagate the abolition of slavery? Should they use political action to achieve their goals? The problems faced by the 19th Century abolitionists were very similar to the ones faced by 20th Century libertarians in their struggle to achieve a free society.

I would not be a Moses to lead you into the Promised Land, because if I could lead you in someone else could lead you out of it.

- attributed to Eugene Debs by Dave Dellinger in Larry and Lena Gara (eds.), A FEW SMALL CANDLES (1999), p. 23.

William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, and Henry Clarke Wright were the leaders of the radical abolitionist movement in America. These men and their followers in the New England Non-Resistance Society held that all office holding and voting was morally wrong and reprehensible. Ultimately, the Garrisonians came to see the Constitution as a document which supported slavery and one to which they could not swear personal allegiance. These abolitionists suggested many of the arguments used by anti-political libertarians today. For example, they raised the issue of personal integrity. How could any abolitionist (read, libertarian) accept a government salary or swear a public oath of allegiance to the Constitution, or uphold laws which violate personal liberty? Garrison argued that political parties alter one's fundamental outlook towards the State. The Liberty Party, which had been purposely formed as an anti-slavery party in 1840, appalled Garrison, both as a matter of theory and of tactics. He claimed that an anti-slavery party would split the movement and dilute anti-slavery principles by dragging them into the political gutter.

The Garrisonian ideas were propagated in many forums. Garrison engaged in a debate with James Birney, soon to be head of the Liberty Party in the 1830s. In their A Letter on the Political Obligations of Abolitionists (Boston: Dow and Jackson, 1839) Garrison argued that moral suasion, not political action, was needed to reform public sentiment. Both of Garrison's chief helpers, Phillips and Wright, independently expressed their anti-political views. Wright authored a small book entitled Ballot Box and Battlefield (Boston: Dow and Jackson, 1842) in which he claimed that the ballot box was only a make shift substitute for the violence of bullets on the battlefield. Wright held that no man could honestly undertake to become a voter and then vote against the existence of government. "May a man consent to be invested with power to do

an evil?," he asked. Wright claimed that a man may never rightfully consent to do what he thinks wrong. He who would do so proves himself dishonest. "He consents to be vested with power to do what he acknowledges to be wrong, and swears to do it. Such a man is unworthy of any trust." Thus Wright concluded that the fact that any man, knowing the nature and duties of a Congressman or President, "will consent to hold these offices, is of itself sufficient evidence that he is not a true and good man." Wright summarized his argument by stating that he would not vote, even if by his one vote he could free all the slaves. Wendell Phillips considered the question: Can an Abolitionist Vote or Take Office Under the United States Constitution? (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1845) and concluded quite straight forwardly that they could not.

The secondary literature dealing with the abolitionist position on voting is quite extensive and certainly much easier to locate than some of the primary materials. Two standard discussions of the voting controversy can be found in Aileen Kraditor, *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969) and in Lewis Perry, *Radical Abolitionism: Anarchy and the Government of God in Antislavery Thought* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973). Another excellent discussion of the "Garrisonian Critique" of politics can be found in William Wiecek, *The Sources of Antislavery Constitutionalism in America, 1760-1848* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977). Some of Henry Clarke Wright's writings (see the index for the entries under Wright), as well as excerpts from the Garrison-Birney exchange (see pp. 153-160), can be found in Truman Nelson's *Documents of Upheaval, Selections From William Lloyd Garrison's The Liberator 1831-1865* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966).

I would like to see a world where people can move as freely from one country to another as they currently do from one American state to another.

- Robert Guest, *BORDERLESS ECONOMICS* (2011), p. 220.

Another very interesting aspect of the abolitionist movement is to be found in the writings of Henry David Thoreau and his close friend Charles Lane. Lane was an Englishman attracted to this country through his friendship with Bronson Alcott (another close friend of Thoreau). Both Alcott and Lane were arrested for refusal to pay their town taxes and their examples served to spur Thoreau onto his well-known example of tax resistance. All three were opposed to voting and made their views widely known. Lane wrote an extensive series of letters which appeared in Garrison's *The Liberator* in 1843. They were entitled *A Voluntary Political Government* and have been recently reprinted (Carl Watner, editor, St. Paul: Michael Coughlin, Publisher, 1982). In the letters, Lane advocated a totally voluntary, anarchistic society. Lane's aversion to politics is apparent in

many of the letters and he realized that governmental control rests on the acquiescence of the citizenry. "This mixture of education with politics [by which he meant public schooling] is only a contrivance to gild the iron chains by which men are so despotically bound." In his third letter, Lane urged us to go as far as possible from human governments. Participation in politics is evil. "Like all our enemies, State oppression will die of itself if we meddle not with it," and do not support it. Disown the government and do not support it with your taxes. Enlighten the oppressed as to their own self-imposed servitude, but stay away from the State for it will only contaminate you. The similarity between Lane's answer and Thoreau's solution in Thoreau's own "Resistance to Civil Government" (better known as his essay on "Civil Disobedience") (*Aesthetic Papers*, Boston: Elizabeth Peabody, 1849) is quite striking:

"When the subject has refused allegiance, and the officer has resigned his office, then the revolution is accomplished."

Lysander Spooner, the famous individualist-anarchist and constitutional lawyer, also played a prominent role in the abolitionist movement. Before he evolved into an outright anarchist, Spooner wrote some trenchant and logical attacks against the Garrisonian claim that the Constitution supported slavery. These are reprinted in *The Collected Works of Lysander Spooner* (Charles Shively, editor, Weston: M & S Press, 1971) and appear as *The Unconstitutionality of Slavery* (Boston: Bela Marsh, Part I - 1845 and Part II - 1847). Spooner's famous *An Essay on Trial By Jury* (Boston: John Jewett and Co., 1852) and his attacks on the Fugitive Slave law were all written to show why the common law, when uncorrupted by State legislation, upheld individual rights and destroyed slavery. There are some brilliant passages in all these works upholding natural rights, and especially the rights of all citizens to resist unjust acts of oppression perpetrated by the government (see his *A Defence For Fugitive Slaves*, Boston: Bela Marsh, 1850, Chapter II, "The Right of Resistance, and the Right to have the Legality of that Resistance judged of by a Jury").

After the Civil War, and as a result of having lived through a domestic rebellion in which all the ideals of the American Revolution were totally ignored, Spooner became an anarchist. In his *No Treason* (1867 and 1870) series Spooner showed that the U.S. government could not claim either voting or tax-paying as proof that individuals consented to the government. Neither were evidence of any single person's consent to the Constitution as a legal document. Spooner claimed that both paying taxes and voting were done under indirect threats, and therefore, were to be construed as acts of self-defense. However, Spooner never maintained that people should vote or that voting was proper or that he personally would ever take any part in the political process. Rather, he argued that when and if people

vote, their actions were not to be interpreted as evidence that they actually supported the Constitution. Spooner eventually concluded that no one should have the right to vote or make laws. "No human being, nor any number of human beings, have any right to make laws, and compel other human beings to obey them. To say that they have is to say that they are masters and owners of those whom they require such obedience." Spooner's final conclusions on voting were expressed in his piece "Against Woman Suffrage," which was reprinted in Benjamin Tucker's *Liberty* (June 10, 1882, No. 22, p. 4) and in *Rampart Individualist* (Vol. 1, No. 1 and 2, Winter and Spring 1981, pp. 53-55).

Many other 19th Century individualist-anarchists supported Spooner's position against political involvement. Josiah Warren, for example, one of the earliest American anarchists, rejected politics and engaged in a lifelong quest for the development of anarchist communities. Benjamin Tucker, the student of both Warren and Spooner, and editor of the famous journal *Liberty* (1881-1908), compiled his views on anarchist methods in a section of his book, *Instead of A Book* (originally published 1893, and reprinted by Haskell House Publishers, New York, 1969). The best of Tucker's anti-political views are presented in a short editorial called "The Method of Anarchy" (*Liberty*, June 18, 1887; Haskell House edition, p. 415). Tucker advocated passive resistance as the superior alternative to either ballots or violent revolution.

Referring to the Voluntaryist insight, Tucker claimed that passive resistance (which hereafter shall be referred to as non-violent 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. When a determined body of people, sufficiently strong in numbers and force of character to command respect and make it unsafe to imprison them, shall agree to quietly close their doors in the face of the tax collector, ... government ... will go by the board." Tucker cited the near success of the Irish Land League and No Rent Movement in Ireland as examples of non-violent resistance campaigns.

Francis Tandy (a follower of Tucker) in his chapter on "Methods" in *Voluntary Socialism* (Denver: by the author, 1896) reiterated the strength of Tucker's argument for non-violent resistance. "To gain anything by political methods, it is first necessary to gain a majority of the votes cast, and even then you have to trust to the integrity of the men elected to office. But with non-violent resistance this is unnecessary. ... A strong, determined and intelligent minority, employing methods of non-violent resistance, would be able to carry all before it." Tandy astutely pointed out the important relationships between means and ends in libertarian thought. Non-

violent "resistance can never pass a law. It can only nullify laws. Consequently, it can never be used as a means of coercion and is particularly adapted to the attainment of Anarchy. All other schools of reform propose to compel people to do something. For this they must resort to force, usually by passing laws. These laws depend upon political action for their inauguration and physical violence for their enforcement. Anarchists are the only reformers who do not advocate physical violence. Tyranny must ever depend upon the weapon of tyranny, but Freedom can be inaugurated only by means of Freedom." Tandy realized that when non-violent resistance is practiced, attention is drawn to its underlying principles. "Thus education and non-violent resistance go hand in hand and help each other, step by step, towards the goal of human Freedom." A good discussion of late 19th Century individualist-anarchist strategy will appear in the forthcoming *Liberty* centennial volume in the chapter by Morgan Edwards, "Neither Bombs Nor Ballots: Benjamin Tucker and the Strategy of Anarchism" (Los Angeles: by the author, 1981).

Political power corrupts everything it touches and governments touch us in thousands of ways.
- Paraphrased from Rick Maybury, EARLY WARNING REPORT, June 2003.

During the first half of the 20th Century, the few well-known libertarians actually followed the anti-political pattern set by Spooner, Tucker, and Tandy. Albert Jay Nock's overall attitude certainly precluded political action. In his essay "What The American Votes For", (reprinted in *Snoring as a Fine Art and Twelve Other Essays*, Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1971) which originally appeared in *The American Mercury* of February 1933, Nock claims that the only time he ever voted he cast a write-in ballot for Jefferson Davis on the basis that "if we can't have a live statesman, let us by all means have a first-class corpse" (p. 90). In his essay "Anarchist's Progress" (reprinted in *On Doing The Right Thing and Other Essays*, Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1971, first published 1928) Nock points out why it is impossible for the best intentioned office holder not to sell out to the system: Suppose that you put a Sunday school superintendent in charge of a whorehouse. "He might trim off some of the coarser fringes of the job, ...and put things in ... a state of 'outward order and decency'," but he must run a whorehouse, or he would promptly hear from the owners. The voters elect politicians to administer the State, not to destroy it. In the final analysis, Nock thought that "great and salutary social transformations, such as in the end do not cost more than they come to, are not effected by political shifts, by movements, by programs and platforms, least of all by violent revolutions, but by sound and disinterested thinking."

H. L. Mencken, despite his outward appearances as a newspaperman, had some rather acerbic thoughts on the political system. His book *Prejudices: Fourth*

Series (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1924) carries two implicitly anti-political essays, "The Politician" and "On Government." Mencken begins his analysis of the politician by pointing out the assumption of the great majority of American voters: that politicians are divided into two classes, and that one of those classes is made up of good ones. Hence the American public thinks that every time they turn one set of politicians out of office, they will get better ones in their place. But how wrong they are, as history has proved: the "primary error lies in making the false assumption that some politicians are better than others" (p. 133). Obviously they are not. "Politics, as hopeful men practice it in the world, consists mainly of the delusion that a change in form is a change in substance" (p. 227).

Frank Chodorov really got to the heart of the matter when he declared that "the State itself, regardless of its composition, is an exploitative institution" (Fugitive Essays, Selected Writings of Frank Chodorov, selected by Charles Hamilton, Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1980, p. 91). No matter who operates a whorehouse (to use Nock's metaphor) still operates a whorehouse; and any class of politician, even if they call themselves libertarians, are still politicians. It makes little difference whether libertarians, socialists, Democrats, or Republicans are in office; the State is still nothing more than a criminal gang. In his essays "On Underwriting an Evil" (in *Out of Step*, New York: Devin-Adair, 1962) and "If We Quit Voting" (pp.200-205 of *Fugitive Essays*), Chodorov advocated staying away from the polls. "Why should a self-respecting citizen endorse an institution grounded in thievery?" A voter's boycott, unlike other revolutions, but much like non-violent resistance campaigns, "calls for no organization, no violence, no war fund, and no leader to sell it out."

Other more recent libertarians have similarly called for mass non-participation in the electoral process. Robert LeFevre engaged in lengthy correspondence with a number of Congressional representatives and senators during 1972 in an effort to determine the legitimacy of their participation in government. Drawing much on Spooner's analysis of elected representatives, LeFevre demonstrates in his *The Power of Congress (As Congress Sees It)* (Los Angeles: R. S. Radford, 1976) that the theory of electoral representation has no firm basis. His correspondents could not agree "whether representatives should really be agents of their electors and varied widely in the interpretation of their own function and authority." LeFevre contends that because of the secret ballot and the structure of our political institutions elected office holders are in fact representatives of no one. They had best all pack up and go home!

Sy Leon in his *None of the Above – The Lesser of Two Evils . . . is Evil* (Santa Barbara: Fabian Publishing, 1976) attacks majority rule as a violation of individual rights and opposes the political vote.

Voting is wrong because it does not give individuals the right to express their true opinions about the politicians. The politicians do not dare insert "None of the Above" on the ballot for fear that no politician would be elected to office. Robert Ringer in his bestseller, *Restoring the American Dream* (New York: QED, 1979) cites Leon favorably and makes some telling comments about the Libertarian Party and voting in general: "When you vote for a candidate, you are voting to put someone in a position to rule the lives of your fellowman – men who either do not want that candidate to rule them or do not want 'anyone' to rule them" (p. 285). "The most disconcerting thing about the Libertarian Party is that it 'is' a political party" (p. 288). Every political party and every politician is subject to the historical law of corruption: Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Among the younger generation of contemporary libertarians, Samuel Edward Konkin III and George H. Smith have led the attack against political action. Konkin's magazine *New Libertarian* and his "Movement of the Libertarian Left" have long criticized the Libertarian Party. "He who serves the Party serves the State" because it is impossible to destroy the system by joining it. Konkin's emphasis on counter-economics and agorism, as alternatives to political strategies, is set forth in his *New Libertarian Manifesto* (Box 1748, Long Beach, California 90801, published 1980). Smith, too, has tried to convey the message that politics and libertarianism are inconsistent. One of his earliest attacks on the Libertarian Party was a satirical "Victory Speech of the Libertarian Party President-Elect, 1984" which appeared in Supplement 4 of *New Libertarian Weekly* (no. 46, October 31, 1976). Smith tried to show why a Libertarian President would be involved in all sorts of philosophical predicaments (how would he deal with tax evaders, drug smugglers, victims of victimless crime laws, etc.?). This criticism was followed up by a seriously theoretical piece entitled *Party Dialogue* (*New Libertarian*, Vol. 4, No. 8, Dec. 1980 – Feb. 1981; and reprinted *Baltimore: The Voluntaryists*, 1982) and by an exchange of letters to the editor between Less Antman, a well-known member of the California LP and Smith, in *New Libertarian* (Vol. 5, no. 9, April-June, 1981). His most recent foray against the LP occurred at the California LP Convention on board the Queen Elizabeth II in February 1982. Here he continued his debate with Antman under the title "Political Action vs. Non Political Action" in which they exchanged their views on the validity of political action for libertarians. (See Tapes 651 A and B by Liberty Audio Forum, 824 West Broad Street, Richmond, Va. 23220.) Smith's efforts against the LP have been instrumental in the formation of *The Voluntaryists*, whose purpose is to spread the message that libertarianism must be propagated by non-political means. . . .



The Attitude of Early 19th Century American Temperance Societies

The American Temperance Society ... stands pledged to the public fully ... never to make an appeal to legislators or officers of the law, for the aid of authority in changing the habits of any class of their fellow citizens. Its appeal is to the people.

So read an article in the JOURNAL OF HUMANITY, October 14, 1830 (p. 82).

“Those who shared these views talked much of the power of moral suasion and the correct application of Christian principles of light and love, the inference being that vice could be dispelled by the light of truth, if care was taken not to offend the sensibilities of the erring one. It was folly, they reasoned, to force upon man by legislative enactment that virtue which he could only possess by the dictates of his conscience and the energy of his will. Underlying this unwillingness to resort to legislation was the fear that the temperance movement would be torn asunder by political strife. ...

“To some influential leaders, however, the slow process of changing public opinion by precept and example no longer seemed adequate. ...

“So legislation was urged as a last resort in a critical struggle. ... Those who advocated more stringent

legal restrictions admitted that it was seldom politic to summon legislation to the aid of reform. They realized that laws strikingly in advance of public opinion were destitute of efficacy, ...

“Through pamphlets, newspapers and temperance journals the moral suasionists, as they called themselves, ridiculed the attempt to legislate intemperance from the nation, characterizing it as a device to make the constable a substitute for the teacher and preacher. They regretted the folly of their radical friends who were willing to base a great moral reform on that most uncertain of all elements in social regulation, legal enactment. To depend upon the strong arm of the law to enforce a reformation in manners and morals was to confess defeat. ... Men might be persuaded to change their habits; they could not be coerced. It was, therefore, inevitable that an appeal to the government's coercive power would alienate many devoted friends of temperance. They would regard the new policy as a flagrant infringement of their personal liberty and as an unwarranted interference of non-political associations in the realm of political affairs. ...

“A writer in the COLUMBIA WASHINGTONIAN [circa early 1843] pointed out the fallacy of attempting to reconcile two such antagonistic principles as persuasion and coercion.”

- John Allen Krout, THE ORIGINS OF PROHIBITION (1925), pp. 169-174, 206. V

The Voluntaryist

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