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# The Voluntaryist

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Whole Number 188 “If one takes care of the means, the end will take care of itself.” 1st Quarter 2021

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## Party Dialogue

By George H. Smith

**Libertarian Party Advocate (LPer):** Considering the success that the Libertarian Party has enjoyed in recent years [This piece was written in 1980.], especially in bringing libertarian ideas to the attention of the general public, I am curious why you refuse to support the LP – in fact, you criticize it openly.

**Anti-Political Libertarian (APL):** You raise two issues that need to be untangled. First, I criticize the political side of the LP, i.e., its effort to place libertarians in political office. I don't object to its educational endeavors, as I don't object to any organization that seeks to roll back the State.

Secondly, it is true that the LP gains publicity, but we must ask whether this is the kind of publicity that furthers libertarian goals. Publicity that links libertarianism to a political party – when the essence of libertarianism is anti-political – is counterproductive.

**LPer:** But the public understands that the LP is a party with a difference; it is devoted to liberty. That is the important thing.

**APL:** You beg the question. Can a political party be dedicated to uncompromised liberty? I answer, “No,” and this is why I reject the L.P.

**LPer:** I disagree. There is no reason why libertarian legislators could not dedicate themselves to the repeal of unjust laws. We must remember that the ultimate goal of the LP is a free society.

**APL:** Let's separate campaign rhetoric from reality. It's easy to say that the goal of the LP is a free society. What political party in its right mind would come out against a “free” society? The important point is: What makes the LP a political party? What is its essential characteristic? In other words, what does the LP have in common with other political parties that it does not share with nonpolitical organizations? The answer is simple: the LP seeks political power. The immediate goal of the LP, qua political party, is (and must be) to wrest control of the State apparatus from its competitors, the Democrats and Republicans. The LP bids in the political auction, using the currency of votes in an attempt to buy control of the State machinery.

**LPer:** You're really off-base. The LP does not seek power. On the contrary, it wants to reduce power by dismantling the State. Getting elected to political office is simply a means to this noble end.

**APL:** Let's be clear about this. There is a difference between having power and exercising it. Those who control the State have immense power,

whether or not they exercise it in particular instances. Political power – the capacity and legal sanction to aggress against others – is integral to political office. A State official, libertarian or not, has considerable power over defenseless citizens. It is disingenuous to claim that one aspires to political office but does not seek power. Power is a defining characteristic of political office.

**LPer:** But this is mere semantics! A libertarian politician might have “power” in a legal sense, but he would not use that power unjustly. His power would be used to combat other politicians and to repeal invasive laws.

**APL:** You have just conceded my point. Legal power, which you dismiss so lightly, is what makes a politician a politician. A politician can get together with his neighbors (other politicians) and vote to rob people, and he can bring the force of law to back up this vote. But if I and my neighbors vote to rob someone, we cannot do it with the sanction of law. The politician has this political power, whereas the private citizen does not. This characteristic of political office must never be forgotten.

You admit that even the libertarian politician will have this power after he is elected, but you stipulate that it will be used for beneficent purposes. You prefer to emphasize the (presumed) motives of libertarian politicians – their honorable intentions; whereas I prefer to stress the reality of what political office entails. I don't want anyone to have political power, regardless of his supposed good intentions. I object to the political office itself and to its legitimized power. Frankly, I don't give a whit about the psychological state of the politician.

**LPer:** You seem to be saying that you don't trust the libertarian politician to keep his word. Well, we live in an imperfect world with no absolute guarantees. We hope that libertarian politicians will not compromise. If they do, we shall be the first to denounce them.

**APL:** The issue of trust is quite secondary. Whether I trust this or that politician is not the point, although it does raise an interesting problem. Should the wise maxim often quoted by libertarians, “Power corrupts,” now be amended to read, “Power corrupts – unless you are a libertarian?” It is not clear to me why libertarians are any less susceptible to the temptations of power than the ordinary mortal.

But, as I said, this is not fundamental. I may trust a particular libertarian politician, but I still don't want

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# The Voluntaryist

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## Potpourri from the Editor's Desk

### No. 1 "Loyalty to a State Just Because You Happen to be Born There Is Stupid"

If you earn a good living, certainly if you own your own business and have assets, your fellow Americans are the ones who actually present the clear and present danger. The average American (about 50% of them now) pays no income tax. Even if he's not actually a direct or indirect employee of the government, he's a net recipient of its largesse, which is to say your wealth, through Social Security and other welfare programs. ...

I'm necessarily at odds with many of "my fellow Americans;" they're an active and growing liability. Some might read this and find a disturbing lack of loyalty to the state. It sounds seditious. ...

[Treason is one of the two crimes] specified in the US Constitution. ... Treason is usually defined as an attempt to overthrow a government or withdraw loyalty from a sovereign. A rather odd proviso to have when the framers of the Constitution had done just that only few years before, one would think.

The way I see it, Thomas Paine had it right when he said, "My country is wherever liberty lives."

- An excerpt by Doug Casey from his INTERNATIONAL MAN, October 12, 2018.

### No. 2 "How the Collectivist Myth Fades"

This is the fulfillment of statism. It is a state of mind that does not recognize any ego but that of the collective. For analogy one must go to the pagan practice of human sacrifice: when the gods called for it, when the medicine man so insisted, as a condition for prospering the clan, it was incumbent on the individual to throw himself into the sacrificial fire. In point of fact, statism is a form of paganism, for it is worship of an idol, something made by man. Its base is pure dogma. Like all dogmas this one is subject to interpretations and rationales, each with its coterie of devotees. But, whether one calls himself a communist, socialist, New Dealer, or just plain "democrat," each

begins with the premise that the individual is of consequence only as a servant of the mass-idol. It will be done.

There are stalwart souls, even in this twentieth century. There are some who in the privacy of their personality hold that collectivism is a denial of a higher order of things. There are nonconformists who reject the Hegelian notion that "the state incarnates the divine idea on earth." There are some who firmly maintain that only man is made in the image of God. As this remnant - these individuals - gains understanding and improves its explanations, the myth that happiness is to be found under collective authority must fade away in the light of liberty.

- Frank Chodorov, THE FREEMAN, "The Dogma of Our Times," June, 1956.

### No. 3 "Consider the State *de novo*."

We will explore the entire notion of a State-less society, a society without formal government, in later chapters. But one instructive exercise is to try to abandon the habitual ways of seeing things, and to consider the argument for the State *de novo*. Let us try to transcend the fact that for as long as we can remember, the State has monopolized police and judicial services in society. Suppose that we were all starting completely from scratch, and that millions of us had been dropped down upon the earth, fully grown and developed, from some other planet. Debate begins as to how protection (police and judicial services) will be provided. Someone says: "Let's all give all of our weapons to Joe Jones over there, and to his relatives. And let Jones and his family decide all disputes among us. In that way, the Joneses will be able to protect all of us from any aggression or fraud that anyone else may commit. With all the power and all the ability to make ultimate decisions on disputes in the hands of Jones, we will all be protected from one another. And then let us allow the Joneses to obtain their income from this great service by using their weapons, and by exacting as much revenue by coercion as they shall desire." Surely in that sort of situation, no one would treat this proposal with anything but ridicule. For it would be starkly evident that there would be no way, in that case, for any of us to protect ourselves from the aggressions, or the depredations, of the Joneses themselves. No one would then have the total folly to respond to that long-standing and most perceptive query: "Who shall guard the guardians?" by answering with Professor Black's blithe: "Who controls the temperate?" It is only because we have become accustomed over thousands of years to the existence of the State that we now give precisely this kind of absurd answer to the problem of social protection and defense.

- From Murray Rothbard, FOR A NEW LIBERTY, Chapter 3, "The State," (1978 and 2006, 2nd edition) pp. 84-85. [V]

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## Standing on the Shoulders of Giants

By Carl Watner

[This article originally appeared as the "Foreword" to the 1995 Fox & Wilkes edition of Charles T. Sprading (editor), *LIBERTY AND THE GREAT LIBERTARIANS* which originally was published by Golden Press in 1913.]

In a recent *Wall Street Journal* news column about libertarians, a computer consultant said, "government isn't simply irrelevant, it's totally irrelevant." (1) If that comment can make the front page of the *Journal*, then the re-publication of *Liberty and the Great Libertarians* is both pertinent and timely. In the *Journal* article, libertarians were described as those who "question the need for a government role in virtually every area of their lives, personal as well as economic." The motivation for this current skepticism is mostly pragmatic. When the war on drugs is failing, when the government cannot deliver the mail on time, or fails to deliver on any of its promises, people begin to ask: "Who needs it, anyway?"

Charles Sprading, the editor of this early 20<sup>th</sup> century anthology, has left us a record of liberty as it appeared to him during the early years of this century. As might be expected, the authors assembled here are a diverse group of libertarians. Some advocate limited political governments, others believe in nothing but personal self-government, but whatever their persuasion, they all hang together by dint of their objection to what they see as the wrongful invasion of person and property. Not having the benefit of Austrian free market economics, many early libertarians were often voluntary socialists in outlook. (In fact, one of Sprading's earliest mentors, Francis Tandy, wrote a well-respected libertarian tract entitled *Voluntary Socialism* [Denver, 1896]). They often attacked interest, rent, and profits because they believed these forms of wealth rested on State privilege, not market forces. However right or wrong their economic analysis, they always supported individual liberty over enforced collectivism.

Sprading only looked as far back as the 18<sup>th</sup> century for his sources. Had he been familiar with them, he might have included several instances of libertarian thinking and non-State alternatives that are much older. One of the earliest examples is from the Old Testament prophet Samuel. From the time of Moses to the monarchy of Saul (circa 1240 B.C. to 1020 B.C.), the Jews of the Old Testament lived without any coercive governmental authority in their lives. When the institution of a kingship was broached, Samuel warned the people that they would rue the day when they made it possible for the State to assume control over their lives. In *I Samuel*, he correctly predicted that with the State would come taxation, conscription, and eminent domain.

The Roman stoics and Christian martyrs, a thou-

sand years later, moved libertarian thought in a different direction. Epictetus the Stoic, around 90 A.D., urged men to defy tyrants in such a way as to cast doubt on the necessity of government itself. "If the government directed them to do something their reason opposed, they were to defy the government. If it told them to do what their reason would have told them to do anyway, they did not need a government." (2) The early Christians differentiated liberty and freedom. Liberty, they understood, has to do with the absence of physical restraints on the body. Their liberty was curtailed when they were tortured and told to renounce their beliefs. Their freedom, however, was untouched because their captors could not injure their philosophy or make them change their minds. The truth, they believed, would make men free, because freedom is an attitude of mind and spirit. A person may be free in his mind, even though his body be imprisoned.

Most often the best way to avoid real trouble in the last place is to take a strong moral stand in the first place. When will people realize that it is compromise on moral principles in the first place that produces catastrophic consequences in the end?

- Edward Madden, *CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE AND MORAL LAW IN 19TH CENTURY AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY* (1968), p. 35.

Over fifteen hundred years into the Christian era, Etienne de la Boetie, a Frenchman, wrote the great libertarian tract *The Discourse on Voluntary Servitude*. His argument is structured around the voluntarist insight that the State is grounded upon popular acceptance. La Boetie not only bitterly opposed tyranny, but objected to the public's consent to its own subjection on the grounds of natural law and a natural right to liberty. La Boetie called for civil disobedience and mass non-violent resistance because withdrawal of consent would quickly undermine the foundation of State power. As he put it, "The tyrant has, indeed, nothing more than the power that you confer upon him to destroy you. Resolve to serve no more, and you are at once freed." (3) The remedy to political power is simply to stop supplying the rulers with the funds, resources, and obedience that they need. La Boetie's analysis of one-man tyranny was applied by 19<sup>th</sup> century libertarian anarchists to democratic as well as totalitarian forms of government. Henry David Thoreau, Benjamin Tucker, and Leo Tolstoy, authors found in this book, all advocated non-violent resistance to the State.

Opposition to the State on practical and economic grounds has only evolved in the last 200 years. Thinkers such as Bernard Mandeville, Adam Ferguson, and Adam Smith began this trend by pointing out the benefits of relying on "the invisible hand." Like the latter day adherents of the Austrian

school of economics, these free-market oriented intellectuals analyzed such institutions as trade, money and language, and found they were the result of the natural, spontaneous social order, not governmental rules. Belgian-born economist Gustave de Molinari (1819-1912) was the first to reach the logically consistent conclusion of laissez-faire economics. His 1849 article, "The Production of Security," argued that the free market can and should supply all goods and services, including those public services, such as police, courts, and the armed services, which the State traditionally monopolizes. The State is not exempt from the natural laws of economics. If consumers of protection services are to receive the best product at the least cost, then the production of security should be left to the free market. Molinari, 150 years ago, painted a picture of exactly where we are today: Whenever "the consumer is not free to buy security wherever he pleases, you forthwith see open up a large profession dedicated to arbitrariness and bad management. Justice becomes slow and costly, the police vexatious, individual liberty is no longer respected, the price of security is abusively inflated and inequitably apportioned... In a word, all the abuses inherent in monopoly or in communism crop up."(4)

Modern readers should use this book to familiarize themselves with some of the historical and intellectual roots of libertarianism. If an update to this collection were made, I would include such libertarian "greats" as Frank Chodorov, Andrew Galambos, Henry Hazlitt, R. C. Hoiles, Rose Wilder Lane, Robert LeFevre, H. L. Mencken, Ludwig von Mises, Albert Jay Nock, Isabel Paterson, Ayn Rand, Leonard Read, and Murray Rothbard. Sprading's "greats" and these more contemporary libertarians form a series of connecting links in the search for freedom and liberty. Every individual, every generation, stands on the intellectual shoulders of those who have gone before. Let us be among those who stand on the shoulders of the "giants" of liberty.

1. Gerald F. Seib, "Libertarian Impulses Show Growing Appeal Among the Disaffected," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 20, 1995, A1.

2. William D. Grampp, *Economic Liberalism* (New York: Random House, 1963), Vol. 1, *The Beginnings*, p. 26.

3. Etienne de la Boetie, *The Politics of Obedience: The Discourse of Voluntary Servitude*, trans. Harry Kurz (New York: Free Life Press, 1975), p.16.

4. Gustave de Molinari. *The Production of Security*, trans. J. Huston McCulloch from *Journal des Economistes*, February 1849, pp. 277-290, (New York: The Center for Libertarian Studies, 1977), pp. 13-14. [V]

## Party Dialogue

(Continued from page 1)

him to have political power over me. Libertarians

stress that liberty is a natural right. If a legal/political system violates this right as a matter of policy, then the system is unjust to some degree. Libertarians should oppose this injustice in principle. We should seek to abolish the mechanism whereby one individual, in virtue of political office, can employ legitimized aggression against other individuals.

"Elect me to office," proclaims the libertarian politician, "give me enormous power over you and your property, but rest assured that I shall abstain from using this power unjustly." I reply: You have no right to such power in the first place – and as a libertarian you should know this. You should be denouncing the very office to which you aspire. You say your campaign literature is honest and forthright, Mr. would-be-Senator; but search as I may I cannot find the statement, "The office of Senator, as we know it, should be abolished." This lacuna is understandable, however, in view of the embarrassment that the statement would cause you. For then even a child might be prompted to ask: "But Mr. would-be-Senator, if the institution of senator is wrong in itself (because of its built-in political power), then how can you, in good conscience, ask us to make you a Senator?"

**LPer:** You bog down in technicalities. This business about the incompatibility of libertarianism and political office is just so much theoretical fluff. Let's get down to the real world. I still don't see why a libertarian Senator could not consistently and conscientiously work for the elimination of unjust laws.

If it is not right, do not do it. If it is not true, do not say it.

- Marcus Aurelius

**APL:** If you don't see it, it is because (to paraphrase Plato) you have eyes but no intelligence. You don't see the answer because you don't ask the right question. We don't start with the concept of a "Libertarian Senator" and then inquire whether this person can be trusted. The basic difficulty is with the concept of a "Libertarian Senator" to begin with.

"Libertarian" and "Senator" (for Senator, read: "any political office") are like a square and a circle. One cannot be both at the same time and in the same respect. The "technicality" to which you object is the law of noncontradiction.

What does it mean, in this society, to be a Senator? Among other things, it signifies the legal privilege; to formulate and enact laws without any necessary regard for the justice of those laws, and it permits one to dispense massive amounts of stolen money. Such powers, inherent in the office of Senator, are incompatible with libertarian principles. Libertarians should oppose not just this or that Senator, but the office of "Senator" itself.

**LPer:** But couldn't a libertarian accept a political office while being fully aware that the legal power inherent in that office is illegitimate? He need not exercise the options legally available to him, after all. As a libertarian, he would know that he has no right to act unjustly, regardless of his political situation.

**APL:** You confuse the subjective with the objective. A person can believe just about anything. A libertarian Senator may believe that he is faking it, that he doesn't really take the authority of his office seriously. He may convince himself that, although an agent and employee of the State, he is really and truly anti-state. It is similarly possible, I suppose, for an army general to convince himself that he is anti-military despite his occupation. Whether this kind of subversion from within is good strategy is a topic for another conversation. But the facts remain. The office of Senator is defined independently of the desires of individual Senators. The powers of political office do not depend upon the secret desires of the LP politician, nor do they change because the politician keeps his fingers crossed while taking the oath of office.

One cannot deny the legitimacy of the Senatorial office, as libertarians must logically do, and simultaneously advocate someone for that position. One should not accept the designation of "Senator," knowing full-well what this implies, while mouthing libertarian principles.

Consider an extreme case. If we lived under a dictatorship, would the LP advocate that a libertarian take over the office of dictator, or would it fight for the abolition of dictatorship itself?

**LPer:** Abolition must certainly be the goal of any libertarian. This doesn't mean, however, that abolition could not be achieved through the former method. It would be preferable to have a libertarian "dictator" who refuses to exercise the powers of his office, rather than an authentic dictator. Don't you agree?

**APL:** If we must have a dictator, then I prefer to have the most benign one possible. But a benign dictator is still a dictator; and if there were a group of self-professed "libertarians" who were expending their time, energy, and resources in an effort to put their version of a benign dictator in power to replace the current one, then I would have grave doubts about their libertarian credentials. And I would view their candidate for dictator as a threat, even if one less serious than the present dictator.

**LPer:** So you would support the libertarian "dictator."

**APL:** No. I would not support any dictator. I might prefer your dictator to the current one, but I wouldn't support either of them. If I am given a choice between Mr. Jones, who plans to cut off my head, and Mr. White, who plans to cut off my hands, then I may prefer Mr. White to Mr. Jones, since I

would rather lose my hands than my head. But I certainly wouldn't support or condone either Mr. Jones or Mr. White. Both are my enemies, even if one is relatively less harmful than the other.

We must not forget the central point. Your dictator might be preferable to another dictator. There are obvious differences in degree. But we are concerned not only with the relative demerits of dictators, but with the possibility that one can be a dictator and a libertarian at the same time. Can libertarians actively support and promote a benign dictator, just because he might be the best dictator available? This is a peculiar situation indeed, and it would force libertarians to support the lesser of two evils.

In short, I would not call your candidate for dictator a libertarian, because the two are incompatible. I might call him a well-intentioned dictator, but he is no libertarian. And I would oppose him, because my principles leave me no option. There is no proviso in my stand against dictators that exempts those with good intentions.

I see no reason why any man should be compelled to pay for the religion of another man, any more than for his instruction in grammar, philosophy, or anything else.

- Joseph Priestley, FAMILIAR LETTERS ADDRESSED TO THE INHABITANTS OF BIRMINGHAM (1790), pp. 49-50.

Similarly, your Libertarian Senator may do less harm (and even some positive good) when compared to Democrats and Republicans. He may reduce taxes, for example, or help avoid war. But fewer taxes and peace are not distinctively libertarian positions; some conservatives and liberals advocate the same things. What distinguishes libertarianism is the basis for its opposition to taxes and war (the rights of the individual) and the logical extreme to which it carries its opposition. Most importantly, there is the libertarian analysis of the State as a ruling elite – the fundamental cause of taxes and war. The oppressive nature of the State is at the core of libertarian theory, and it requires libertarians to take a principled stand against the State per se. Now the State is an institution with different levels of authority, and it is this authority – legitimized aggression, as I described earlier – which libertarians must oppose.

You see, therefore, that libertarians 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? Do we dislike President Carter because he has the wrong ideas? No. We dislike him because he is dangerous, and he is dangerous because he is President. Millions of individuals may have even



worse ideas than Carter, but we don't single them out for disdain unless they are in a position to enforce their views. The danger lies not in Carter but in the Presidency. Carter derives his power from the office and its legal sanction. The political office itself is the fundamental danger, and that is what we must strive to eliminate. Certainly Carter is a dangerous man, but anyone who is President is dangerous as well. The Presidency embodies political power on an enormous scale, and any person occupying that office, "libertarian" or not, must be opposed by right-thinking libertarians.

**LPer:** Well, your ultimate goals are commendable, but you live in a fantasy world. You don't really believe that political offices are just going to fade away, do you?

**APL:** No, but neither do I believe that a group of libertarians are going to take over the government, establish themselves in power, and then attempt to abolish the instrument of their power and livelihood, the State. Now there is a real fantasy.

**LPer:** So what do you suggest instead? It's one thing to criticize, but it's more difficult to map an alternate strategy.

**APL:** First of all, let's get something straight. This is not – I repeat, not – an issue of strategy. You LPers seem to have difficulty in understanding this, so I have to place special emphasis on it. I am not accusing the LP of faulty strategy here (although this is a lively topic for another discussion). This is not simply a matter of how to get from here to there.

**LPer:** But we both agree on the desirability of a free society. It seems to me that we just disagree on how best to achieve it.

**APL:** Yes, we are in basic agreement concerning the goal to be achieved. But I am not merely asserting that the political method is inefficient in pursuit of this goal. Rather, I am arguing that the political means is inconsistent with libertarian principles, that it flies in the face of basic libertarian ideals. Consider an analogy. I state that a basic goal in my life is to acquire a good deal of money. You concede that this goal is, in itself, unobjectionable. Then I proceed to rob a bank. You are horrified and demand to know how I could do such a thing. I reply that we have a strategic difference of opinion. We both agree that my goal is laudable; we simply disagree concerning the means by which to attain it. We disagree on how to get from here to there. So I demand from you an alternative strategy for me to get rich. Sure, I say, my plan may not be perfect, but what can you purists offer in its place? Give me an alternate strategy, I demand, before taking pot shots at mine.

How would you reply to this? I suspect that you would accuse me of shifting ground. You would point out that the objection to robbing banks is not a simple issue of strategy, but involves profound moral questions. And you would say that your protest

against my action was moral, rather than strategic, in nature. Therefore, unless I can surmount the moral objections to robbing banks, the strategy question is irrelevant. I cannot squirm past the moral issues, the matters of principle, in the guise of demanding alternate strategies.

Now, returning to the subject of political action, I respond to your question the same way. Fine, let's get together and talk over the issue of strategy someday – we can talk about education, moral suasion, counter-economics, alternative institutions, civil disobedience, or what have you – but that's not the issue here. I submit that there is a profoundly anti-libertarian aspect of political action – i.e., of attempting to elect libertarians to public office – and this is the issue to which political libertarians must first address themselves. Show me that political action is consistent with libertarian principles, and then we can take up the issue of strategy.

**LPer:** But you must address yourself to the issue of strategy at some point. You wish to disqualify the political means altogether, which seems to leave you precious little by which you can work for a free society. If your principles condemn you to inaction and certain defeat, then surely there must be something wrong with your principles.

When you undertake political action and support a candidate, and your guy wins, it means that instead of being sold out by someone you opposed, you will be betrayed by someone you supported.  
- Ron Neff

**APL:** This is quite curious. You equate activism with political action. Doing something, for you means, doing something political. You regard an anti-political libertarian as a non-activist, and this is surely one of the most pernicious myths circulating in the LP today. Often, when LP members learn that I am not a member of "The Party," I am greeted with the cute remark: "Oh, you're a libertarian with a small 'l.'" To this I frankly feel like replying, "Yes, and you're an Idiot with a big 'I.'"

**LPer:** O.K., so you don't advocate inaction or passivity. Then what kind of activity, in your view, should libertarians engage in?

**APL:** I will state what I regard as the major challenge confronting libertarians today, and from this you could justify any number of different strategies. Here is the basic issue.

The fight against the State is not merely a fight against naked power – the battle would be much easier if that were so. The essence of the State is not aggression per se, but legitimized aggression. The State uses the sanction of law to legitimize its criminal acts. This is what distinguishes it from the average criminal in the street.

Unfortunately, the reality of the State – what it is in fact – is not how it is perceived by most Americans.

To put it bluntly, the vast majority of Americans disagree with the libertarian view of the State. We may get some agreement on particular points, but the vision of the State as, in essence, a criminal gang, is far more radical than most Americans are willing to accept.

This defines our ultimate educational goal. We must strip the State of its legitimacy in the public eye. We must persuade people to apply the same moral standards to the State as they apply to anyone else. We need not convince people that theft is wrong; we need to convince them that theft, when committed by the State in the name of taxation, does not differ from theft when committed by an individual. We need not persuade people that murder is wrong; we need to persuade them that murder, when committed by the State in the name of war or national defense, does not differ from murder when committed by an individual.

As I said before, political power represents legitimized aggression. Libertarians may not be able to stop all aggression – this would indeed be an unrealistic goal – but they can go far in stripping political aggression of its moral sanctity. This requires all the tools of persuasion that we can muster, and it also underscores the illegitimacy of political action. To run for or support candidates for political office is to grant legitimacy to the very thing we are attempting to strip of legitimacy. One cannot consistently denounce the State as a band of criminals while attempting to swell the ranks of this criminal class with one's own cronies. The hypocrisy is there for all to see. So either you have to reject political action, or you have to water down or abandon your basic principles in order to conceal the glaring inconsistency. Some people call this latter alternative, being practical. I call it being dishonest and hypocritical.

To Be Continued in our Next Issue

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## Pilgrimage of Conscience

*(Continued from page 8)*

given in trust to a firm to be kept in safety and the government coerces this firm's trustees into a violation of that trust. But even more evil than this invasion of rights is the violence done to the individual conscience in forcing him to give financial support wholeheartedly with the affirmation of Presbytery made in February of 1958, that, “A Christian citizen is obligated to God to obey the law but when in conscience he finds the requirements of law to be in direct conflict with his obedience to God, he must obey God rather than man.”

Disobedience to a civil law is an act against

government, but obedience to a civil law that is evil is an act against God.

At this point it came to me with complete clarity that by so much as filing tax returns I was giving to the Revenue Department assistance in the violation of my own conscience, because the very information I had been giving on my tax forms was being used in finally making the collection. So from this point on, or until there is a radical change for the better in government spending, I shall file no returns.

[Reprinted from Staughton Lynd (ed.), *NONVIOLENCE IN AMERICA: A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY*, (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1966), pp. 308-310; and cited as Maurice McCrackin, “Pilgrimage of Conscience” (Cincinnati: 1961), mimeographed, pp. 9-11.] V

### Freedom of Conscience

“It is well known that human freedom is located particularly in the soul, which is the chief part of us and in view of which we are called human. Freedom of the soul means freedom of conscience. This freedom means that a person may accept and hold such religion as his conscience witnesses to him and that no one has the right or power to hinder him in it or forbid it violently. This freedom ... properly belongs to an individual by nature and by natural right because religion is a bond that a person has with God. It is for this reason that he owes an account to no one besides God alone. This whole thing is well-known and requires no proof. ...”

This is pungent language, and it brings together in an original way ideas that had been in play for centuries. Human freedom has its resting place in the inner being. Freedom is a spiritual, not a political, concept. It arises from the bond a person has with God, not from political institutions or arrangements. The phrase “this whole thing is well-known and requires no proof” is admittedly vague - but from what follows, it seems to refer to the dignity of the human beings created in the image of God with the power to choose and act. This reading supports the central point of the passage: freedom is innate and belongs to a person “by nature and natural right.” It is not a privilege granted by government, not an act of accommodation or an act of clemency. It is a right given at birth, and it cannot be taken away by laws or decrees.

[Editor's Note: The first paragraph in this boxed quote is from an anonymous Dutch treatise titled *GOOD ADMONITION TO THE GOOD CITIZENS OF BRUSSELS* (1579) and is reprinted from Robert Louis Wilken, *LIBERTY IN THE THINGS OF GOD* (2019), pp. 109-110. The second paragraph is from Professor Wilken's commentary on this passage.]

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## Pilgrimage of Conscience

By Maurice McCrackin

[Editor's Note: Born in Cincinnati in 1905, Maurice McCrackin (d. 1997) was a Presbyterian minister, a committed pacifist, civil rights activist, and tax resister. These excerpts were first published in 1961.]

I decided that I would never again register for the draft nor would I consent to being conscripted by the government in any capacity. Nevertheless each year around March 15 without protest I sent my tax payments to the government. By giving my money I was helping the government do what I vigorously declared was wrong. I would never give my money to support a house of prostitution or the liquor industry, gambling house or for the purchase and distribution of pornographic literature. Yet year after year I had unquestionably been giving my money to an evil infinitely greater than all of these put together since it is from war's aftermath that nearly all social ills stem.

Income tax paid by the individual is essential to the continuance of the war machine. Over 50% of the military budget is paid for by individuals through their income tax payments and 75% to 80% of every dollar he pays via income tax goes for war purposes.

...  
Having had this awakening [that Jesus would not "support conscription, throw a hand grenade," use a flame thrower, or "release the bomb over Hiroshima

or Nagasaki"], I could no longer in good conscience continue full payment of my federal taxes. At the same time I did not want to withdraw my support from the civilian services which the government offers. For that reason I continued to pay the small percentage now allocated for civilian use. The amount which I had formerly given for war I now hoped to give to such causes as the American Friends Service Committee's program and to other works of mercy and reconciliation which help to remove the roots of war.

To give financial support to war while at the same time preaching against it is, to me, no longer a tenable position.

- Maurice McCrackin quoted by Barry Horstman, THE CINCINNATI POST, July 26, 1999.

As time went on I realized, however, that this was not accomplishing its purpose because year after year the government ordered my bank to release money from my account to pay the tax I had held back. I then closed my checking account and by some method better known to the Internal Revenue Service than to me, it was discovered that I had money in a savings and loan company. Orders were given to this firm, under threat of prosecution, to surrender from my account the amount the government said I owed. I then realized suddenly how far government is now invading individual rights and privileges: money is

*(Continued on page 7)*

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