
The Voluntaryist

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

April 1997

Harry Browne—Have You Forgotten?: "The Lesser of Two Evils Is Still Evil"

By Carl Watner

Opening a recent Laissez Faire Book catalog, I found two diametrically opposed headlines on face-to-face book reviews: "Ridicules the mystique of government," and "A libertarian manifesto for political action." The first book surveyed was the revised, second edition of Sy Leon's *NONE OF THE ABOVE*, originally subtitled "The Lesser of Two Evils ... Is Evil," (and now with a new subtitle—"Why Non-Voters Are America's Political Majority".) The call to electoral politics was Harry Browne's *WHY GOVERNMENT DOESN'T WORK*. Until a year or two ago, Harry Browne had counted himself among the anti-political libertarians refusing to associate themselves with electoral politics. In fact, he had written an introduction to the 1976 edition of *NONE OF THE ABOVE* in which he stated:

[A] growing number of people ... [have] deliberately decided that the voting process is the wrong approach to making social and economic decisions. These are the people who believe that it's wrong for one person to exercise control (through voting or otherwise) over someone else's life and property. [p. 8]

Now Harry Browne is campaigning for office, and trying to become President of "society's dominant producer of coercion," the United States federal government.

Why the sudden change of heart, Harry?

His wife of ten years, Pamela, suggested in 1992 that he run for President. Harry Browne says, "At first I thought the idea was absurd. But we talked about it for two years and in August 1994 I decided I should run. I have only one reason for running, a selfish motivation: I want to live in peace and freedom for my remaining 20-40 years." [p. 214]

Oh, if Harry Browne had only heeded the advice in the new introduction to *NONE OF THE ABOVE*! The introduction was excerpted from John Pugsley's Open Letter, "Harry, Please, Don't Run for President—An Argument In Defense of the Invisible Hand." The letter was printed in No. 74 of *THE VOLUNTARYIST* (June 1995) and also appeared earlier in *LIBERTY Magazine*.

Let's look at some of the alternatives to "politics as usual" that John Pugsley suggested in his Open Letter. Pugsley says we should distance ourselves as far as possible from the State. The vast majority of

his ideas focus on exercising self-control, self-improvement, and relying on voluntary cooperation in our lives in order to accomplish our objectives. Among Pugsley's constructive proposals we find: "create parallel mechanisms to replace government functions," and "support private alternatives to government services." There are also many activities that we can undertake to strip away the myth of government legitimacy. He urges us to master the issues, expose the enemy among us, get involved in campaigns to enlighten and enrage the public, engage in civil disobedience, pamphleteer, and to write free market novels and produce free market movies.

Essentially what John Pugsley told Harry Browne is that he should continue to honor the free market principles which he (Browne) has always preached and, until now, practiced. Harry Browne should well know that trying to achieve liberty by way of political action is like allowing the government to print money in order to achieve prosperity. It won't work; and it's not right to try. Not only are the means not adapted to the end (in the practical sense) but the morality of such an undertaking is dubious, to say the least. Not only is democratic majority rule a myth that our political rulers wish to sustain, but it depends upon the implicit use of force to impose the policies of the winners on the losers.

The primary reason why *THE VOLUNTARYIST* was begun was to offer support to the alternatives to electoral politics and to provide a counterpoint to libertarians who urged us to "get out and vote to support 'our' candidates." Those arguments (moral, practical, and theoretical) have found a continuous home in our pages, and rather than repeat them, I have compiled a list of a number of articles that support the anti-electoral position. *NEITHER BULLETS NOR BALLOTS* was published in late 1983, and contains the following essays: "Party Dialogue" by George Smith; "Demystifying the State" by Wendy McElroy; and "Voluntaryism in the Libertarian Tradition," "A Voluntaryist Bibliography, Annotated," and "Voluntaryism in the European Anarchist Tradition," by Carl Watner. Other pertinent articles published in *THE VOLUNTARYIST* are "The Ethics of Voting," Parts I, II, and III (Nos. 1, 2, & 4); "Book Review of Benjamin Ginsberg, *THE CONSEQUENCES OF CONSENT*" (No. 9); "Button Pushing or Abdication: Which?" (No. 17); "Legitimacy and Elections" (No. 19); "The Voluntaryist Insight: The Political Thought of Etienne de la Boetie" (No. 26); "The Power of Non-

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Potpourri from the Editor's Desk

No. 1 "Liberty and Responsibility"

Thus we come to this: that there is no liberty for the intelligent man as an individual, or in voluntary cooperation with others, except in intelligent obedience to the laws of right living. His first task is to know the world in which he finds himself. He must work and he must study. He is not turned out to riot in self-indulgence because he is free; he must conform to the conditions in which he finds himself. He must obey. When he has broken all the bonds of old institutions, of superstition and human tyranny, he wakes to find that he can have no liberty unless he subdues himself; labor and self-control are the conditions of welfare. He must not cry out that liberty is only a delusion and a juggle; he must understand that what liberty properly means for the individual, is intelligent acceptance of the conditions of earthly life, conformity to them, and manful effort to make life a success under them.

—William Graham Sumner, EARTH HUNGER AND OTHER ESSAYS, pp. 168-169.

No. 2 "On This Reasoning, You Are Not Dead Until Your Death Certificate Is Issued By The State! (Or you will be legally liable for taxes until the IRS receives your official death certificate)"

Births are reported to the local registrar by the person who was responsible for the delivery of the child: physician, midwife or lying-in hospital, as the case may be. The usual period allotted for filing the birth certificate is ten days. These certificates are of great significance, since the child has no real legal proof of existence in the eyes of the state without a proper birth certificate. The state archives of birth certificates are constantly consulted to prove citizenship, to prove exact age, to obtain permission to enter schools or to seek employment under the child labor laws of the state, or to determine whether the

individual has reached marriageable age, for determinations of old age benefits, social security benefits, and for many other purposes. The person may wish to prove his right to vote, to hold public office, to inherit property, or to obtain a pension. The state may use the birth certificate to prove liability for military service.

The national Social Security Act proved to be a great stimulus to accurate birth certification. Many people had never considered a birth certificate to be of any importance until old age assistance, unemployment insurance, and other ramifications of the Social Security Act demonstrated to them that it was necessary to have this official proof of their existence. Everyone in the United States is now willing to agree that each child born is entitled to proper certification of its birth. If the person who is responsible for filing the certificate does not do so, he should be penalized.

—Wilson G. Smillie, PUBLIC HEALTH ADMINISTRATION IN THE UNITED STATES (3rd ed.), 1947, p. 191.

No. 3 "The Slave"

They set the slave free, striking off his chains...
Then he was as much of a slave as ever.
He was still chained to servility,
He was still manacled to indolence and sloth,
He was still bound by fear and superstition,
By ignorance, suspicion, and savagery...
His slavery was not in the chains,
But in himself
They can only set men free...
And there is no need of that:
Free men set themselves free.

—James Oppenheim

[Reprinted from Summer 1995 FRAGMENTS, Box 20058, Floral Park, NY 11002]

No. 4 "Books Received for Review"

TAKING CHARGE THROUGH HOMESCHOOLING: Personal and Political Empowerment by M. Larry and Susan D. Kaseman (1991: Koshkonong Press, 2545 Koshkonong Road, Stoughton WI 53589, \$12.95 postpaid.) Focusing on the family as the pillar of society, this book shows how to homeschool, as well as how to deal with those forces in our society which see the family as a threat to its power base. The authors point up one interesting inconsistency in the statist philosophy of public education. "Compulsory attendance laws require attendance, not education." The law can demand the presence of the child, but the law cannot insure that the child learn anything. Parents who have sued the state for failure to educate their children have been unsuccessful. The "courts have consistently ruled that schools cannot be held accountable if children attending them fail to be educated." (p. 226) Nevertheless,

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Violent Resistance” (No. 27); “Some Critical Considerations on the United States Constitution” (No. 30); “Does Freedom Need to Be Organized?” (No. 34); “The Myth of Political Freedom” (No. 35); “Cultivate Your Own Garden: No Truck With Politics” (No. 40); “The Illegality, Immorality, and Violence of All Political Action” (No. 60); and “The Tragedy of Political Government” (No. 79). Of course, Wendy McElroy’s “Why I Would Not Vote Against Hitler,” appearing in this issue and Sy Leon’s book, *NONE OF THE ABOVE*, need to be added to this list.

Although *NONE OF THE ABOVE* is being offered for sale through *THE VOLUNTARYIST* (\$ 14.00 post-paid), I have one major criticism of the book. It suggests that the option, *None Of The Above*, be added to the ballot, so that those citizens who currently refuse to vote have a place to register their dissent. There are many problems with this proposal, and perhaps this is why it has never been adopted. Non-voters already have a way of demonstrating their disgust with the system: Stay Away from the Polls. Rather than involving non-voters in the system, Leon would have been closer to home to have suggested organizing a “League of Non-Voters.” As a general rule, the political system doesn’t care why you vote or who you vote for; it is the act of voting that counts and helps legitimize the State.

Even the way Leon structures the *None Of The Above* option proves this point. For example, on p. 25 he states that the candidate receiving the most votes (as against all his opponents) will still take office, even if *None Of The Above* wins a plurality of the votes. The only thing *None Of The Above* might do is to demonstrate that elected officials do not necessarily have the support of a majority of the voting citizenry. But this is possible, even now, if anyone cares to publicize the figures. The problem is that Leon does not realize how the State has used elections to shore up its foundations. “The right to vote” does *not* exist “to give the people a choice,” as Leon asserts on p. 27. The right to vote is an illusion of choice created by the State to make people think that they should pay their taxes and abide by the laws of the State because they have had some part in the decision-making process which led to those rules. As Theodore Lowi put it in *THE VOLUNTARYIST*, No. 79 (p. 4):

Participation is an instrument of conquest because it encourages people to give their consent to being governed.... Deeply embedded in people’s sense of fair play is the principle that those who play the game must accept the outcome. Those who participate in politics are similarly committed, even if they are consistently on the losing side. Why do politicians

plead with everyone to get out and vote? Because voting is the simplest and easiest form of participation by masses of people. Even though it is minimal participation, it is sufficient to commit all voters to being governed, regardless of who wins.

In Chapter 3, “The Lesser of Two Evils,” Leon claims that if *None Of The Above* be placed on the ballot, “Then those who disapprove of all the candidates can still participate in the electoral process without having to choose among degrees of evil.” (p. 34) What Leon ignores or misses is the fact that participating in elections—from the voluntarist point of view—is wrong—period. It is an evil to vote, even if you vote for *None Of The Above*, or if your one vote could prevent some Hitlerian candidate from taking office. And even if the State were to pass a law that made voting compulsory (as in some countries, like Australia) it would still be wrong to vote. The point, as Leon seems to forget, is: Voting (in the political context) is wrong regardless of the options it offers you.

The most perceptive discussion of “The Lesser of Two Evils Is Still Evil” that I have found occurs in a book by Milton Mayer titled *THEY THOUGHT THEY WERE FREE* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955, pp. 176-181). Excerpts were printed in *THE VOLUNTARYIST*, No. 31, under the title “The Day The World Was Lost.” A German chemical engineer describes how he succumbed to the Nazi regime. Under the National Defense Law of 1935 he was required to swear an oath of fidelity. Refusal to do so would have meant the loss of his job. His initial opposition to the oath was overcome by his belief that if he kept his job, he might be of help to his Jewish and dissident friends. So he decided to swear—with mental reservations—allegiance to the Nazis. Years later, the chemist admitted that his initial instincts were right: he should have refused to take the oath, and he realized his mental reservations meant nothing to the official who administered it. The oath was an immediate evil and should have been opposed. Committing a positive evil in the hope of achieving a future gain is erroneous thinking. At the time, the possibility of helping his friends was still in the future, and there was no way of knowing whether his apparent loyalty to the Nazi criminals would help save them.

The man eventually did assist a number of the government’s opponents to safety, but he felt that the world “ended” for Germany when he and other educated Germans of the time violated their consciences and chose the lesser of two evils. Had they all had the courage to oppose the regime, the greater evil of World War II and the genocide would probably have been avoided. Even if it hadn’t, there was no justification for doing wrong in order that some greater good “might” come about in the future. At the very least, mass refusal to swear allegiance to

the regime, and other acts of civil disobedience, would have demonstrated to the world that far fewer Germans tacitly approved of the Nazis.

Aside from my objection to the None Of The Above electoral option, there are a number of gems and libertarian insights to be found in Leon's book. I'll share my two favorites. One is found on page 84:

[A]lthough some of the goods and services provided by government are essential, *it is not essential that they be provided by government.*

As a corollary to this statement, we should continue to make clear to others that just because we oppose the government provision of some service (such as schools), this does not mean that we oppose the provision of that service by the free market. Our antagonism to government schooling does not extend to schooling per se, but is directed toward the government.

Near the end of Leon's book, we find him berating those who look upon his rejection of political activity as a "do nothing" attitude. In the process he makes some very voluntarist statements on pages 183-184. There can be no better close to this review than to quote him in full:

Why not support a candidate who shares my view? Because if a person shared my views he could not be a candidate.... An anti-political politician is not to be trusted since the best way to be against something is simply not to participate in it.

Why can't the system be changed from within? Why not enter the political arena with the expressed intent of changing it? Simply because good intentions are not enough....

Just as the way to lessen crime is not to join the ranks of criminals, so the way to lessen the harmful effects of politicians is not to swell their ranks by joining them. There may be more glory and fame in running for political office, as contrasted with spreading one's ideas nonpolitically, but it is not glory and fame that those concerned with human freedom are after.... The public does, and should, look with a jaundiced eye upon any self-proclaimed anti-politician who uses political candidacy as a means of attracting attention.

Walking contradictions are not to be trusted—especially when they are asking for power.

Harry Browne—are you listening? ☑

"When I have to choose between two evils, I always try to pick the one I haven't tried before."

—Mae West

Potpourri from the Editor's Desk

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the major justification for compulsory attendance laws is that "the state has a right to ensure that children do not grow up to be a burden on the state." (p. 221) What a double standard! The public schools cannot be held legally responsible for failure to educate. That failure will result in those children becoming a burden on the state, yet children (and their parents) are threatened with coercion if their children do not attend school.

EDUCATIONAL FREEDOM FOR A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY: A Critique of National Goals, Standards, and Curriculum edited by Ron Miller (1995: Resource Center for Redesigning Education, Box 298, Brandon VT 05733, Tel. 1-800-639-4122, \$21.95 postpaid). The sixteen contributors to this volume oppose the imposition of federal educational standards on public, private, and homeschools in the fifty states. Their focus, however, is far too narrow: no one questions the regulation of education by each of the fifty states. Only one even hints that "the same problems that infect Goal 2000 infect the idea of schooling controlled by local majorities as well." (p. 130) Nevertheless there is some little spark of voluntarism in the book. Ron Miller points out that "genuine freedom is only achieved through discipline." (p. 264) and goes on to quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay "Politics," "The appearance of character makes the State unnecessary." Emerson prefaces this remark by pointing out that "The antidote" (to government) "is the influence of private character, the growth of the individual."

THE NATURE OF CO-OPERATION by John Craig (1993: Black Rose Books, 340 Nagel Drive, Cheektowaga NY 14225) "Co-operation is a social process where people work together [voluntarily] to achieve common goals. Co-operatives are organizations designed to enable people to co-operate in some facet of their lives." They are based on the principles of 1) voluntary membership and private ownership; 2) one member, one vote, regardless of the amount of capital invested; 3) limited interest on share capital; and 4) return of operating surplus to members based upon their patronage or business dealings with the cooperative.

ECONOMIC FREEDOM OF THE WORLD 1975-1995 by James Gwartney, Robert Lawson, and Walter Block (1996: Available from the Cato Institute, 1000 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington DC 20001, \$22.95) This study, ten years in the making, demonstrates that economic freedom leads to greater prosperity. It rates Hong Kong as the place in the world with the greatest amount of "personal choice, pro-

tection of private property and freedom of exchange." The United States is ranked fourth, after New Zealand, and Singapore. Some questions must be raised about their rating format. For example: They pose the following question—"Is it legal (without restrictions) for citizens to maintain bank balances abroad?" (p. 255) They give the United States a perfect score because it permits its citizens to maintain bank balances abroad. Is this correct? Foreign bank accounts must be acknowledged on personal and corporate federal income tax returns. Transfers of certain amounts of cash and certain monetary instruments must also be reported. How can this situation be viewed as "without restrictions"?

No. 5 "Saving Your Own: 'Transforming America'"

"I am convinced that if I saved every 'at-risk' youth in America and lost one of my own, I would have failed in my primary mission. I am reminded of the old adage that 'the family is the original Department of Health, Education and Welfare.' You and I must raise children of valor who can distinguish right from wrong, truth from lies, and appreciate the nobility of a life of courage, honesty and integrity. Only in this way can we truly secure the future..."

—Kay C. James, IMPRIMIS, February 1995, p. 7.

No. 6 "Two Blades of Grass"

The King of Brobdingnag "gave it for his opinion, that whoever could make two ears of corn, or two blades of grass to grow upon a spot of ground where only one grew before, would deserve better of mankind, and do more essential service to his country, than the whole race of politicians put together."

—Jonathan Swift, GULLIVER'S TRAVELS.
Part II, Chapter 5, Paragraph 5.

No. 7 "A Prediction: 'What's Going to Happen'"

"In the name of combatting international infectious disease[s], national sovereignty [and personal freedoms] will undergo an assault which will make all previous efforts pale by comparison. Billions upon billions will be raised, spent, and squandered at taxpayers' expense, measures will be called for and enacted which will restrict international travel of *everyone*—not just those infected—unless they have a U.N.-issued health card."

—Larry Abraham, INSIDER REPORT,
February 1996, pp. 3-4.

No. 8 "Resolved: That an oppressive government is more desirable than no government."

Winston Elliott and Greg Rehmke of the Free Enterprise Institute (9525 Katy Freeway #303, Houston, TX 77024, Tel. 1-800-884-2189) informed me in late 1995 of the forthcoming Lincoln-Douglas debate topic resolution selected for January and February

1996. Their Economics in Argumentation program includes a bi-monthly newsletter, titled LD SOLUTIONS. The January 1996 issue included the following articles: David Beers, "Is Too Little Government Worse Than Too Much?"; Douglas Casey, "Is Government Necessary?"; Greg Rehmke, "A Day Without Government"; Philip Michelbach, "Government Like Fire..."; Mark Skousen, "Persuasion vs. Force"; Albert J. Nock, "Social Power vs. State Power"; and Carl Watner, "Self-government in the 'Wild' West."

No. 9 "Socialism's Fatal Error: No Private Property"

A recent series of comments in THE REVIEW OF AUSTRIAN ECONOMICS presents the differing views of Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich A. Hayek with respect to the problem of economic calculation in a socialist state. The following remarks are excerpted from Hans-Hermann Hoppe's "Socialism: A Property or Knowledge Problem?" (Vol. 9, No 1, 1996, pp. 143-149):

"Mises' well-known calculation argument states this: If there is no private property in land and other production factors, then there can also be no market prices for them. Hence, economic calculation ... is literally impossible. Therefore, socialism's fatal error is the absence of private property in land and production factors, and, by implication, the absence of economic calculation.

"For Hayek, socialism's problem is not a lack of property but a lack of knowledge. His distinctly own thesis is altogether different from Mises. For Hayek, ... it is *practically* impossible to assemble and process all the actually existing knowledge within the mind of a single socialist central planner..."

"[I]t is a non-sequitur to conclude that socialism's central problem is a lack of *knowledge*. This would only follow if prices actually *were* information. However, this is not the case. Prices convey knowledge, but they *are* the exchange ratios of various goods, which result from the voluntary interactions of distinct individuals *based on the institution of private property*. Without the institution of private property, the information conveyed by prices simply does not exist. Private property is the necessary condition ... of the knowledge communicated through prices. But then it is correct only to conclude, as Mises does, that it is the absence of the institution of private property which constitutes socialism's problem. To claim that the problem is a lack of knowledge, as Hayek does, is to confuse cause and effect, or premise and consequence."

No. 10 "The TV V-Chip"

"The television industry has acquiesced in the rating of its programs and that manufacturers install "V-chips" in TVs so that parents can screen out violent and sexual content in programs." Like *every*

government program ... this new War on TV Violence and Raunch will bring about *precisely the opposite* effect of the stated goal. Since inception, television networks have had to toe a vague but very real cultural line drawn by average American households. ... With a government-mandated V-chip, networks will be able to broadcast *any material they want* under the cover of what will become 'the V-chip excuse.' If you think TV programs have loose morals now, wait until Clinton's plan is adopted. *Force never achieves a goal in the long run unless the goal is destruction.*"

—THE ELLIOTT WAVE THEORIST,

March 1, 1996, p. 10

(Box 1618, Gainesville GA 30503).

No. 11 "Voluntaryism or Anarchy?—An Example of Self-imposed Lawfulness"

When friends from abroad ask Anthony Asseily of Schroder's Bank, if most people just run wild during the city's more lawless moments, he likes to tell them the story of his office boy, Munzer Najm, and the telex. During the 1982 siege of West Beirut, Mr. Asseily closed his bank and relocated to London, leaving behind the 32 year-old Munzer—whose job normally consisted of bringing coffee to the bank's employees and guests—with instructions to watch over the place. As far as Mr. Asseily knew, Munzer spoke only Arabic.

"One day last summer I was setting in my office in London," recalls Mr. Asseily, "and suddenly the telex came alive. It was Beirut on the line. My first reaction was to ask how the situation was. The answer came back: 'Not so good.' Then I said, 'Wait a minute, who is this on the line?' The answer came back, 'Munzer.' At first I couldn't believe it. I thought maybe someone had a gun to his head and was telling him what to type. We had a conversation, and eventually I found out that while he was sitting around the bank all that time with nothing to do he had learned some English and taught himself how to operate the telex." As Mr. Asseily freely notes, his coffee boy could have stolen the bank's telex and sold it on the street to the highest bidder just as easily as he learned how to use it. There was no one to stop him: no police, no prisons, no courts; virtually all state authority had evaporated. But he didn't.

To be sure, some people did awful things during Beirut's worst periods of lawlessness. My own apartment was destroyed last summer when two groups of refugees got into an argument over who would get control of the building. The group that lost blew it up, killing 19 people inside.

But such demented acts during extended periods of virtual anarchy never really characterized the behavior of the vast majority of Beirutis. As the cases of Munzer and so many others demonstrate, "people didn't just become animals," ...

When the normal external controls on Beirut society were removed and people were left facing that

existential choice of how to behave, the average person did not go out and rob the corner grocery store.

There were two primary reasons for this self-imposed lawfulness. First, since 1975, Beirut has broken up into a mosaic of neighborhoods, each tied together by interlocking bonds of family, friendship and often religion. These personal relations in each neighborhood tended to keep people upright and honest, even in spite of themselves.

The second reason most people didn't just run wild was that their first instinct appears to have been to do exactly the opposite. Instead of becoming criminal most people became obsessively orderly, organizing every aspect of their lives down to the smallest detail. I always think of the man in my neighborhood who, at the height of the siege of '82, organized the children on his block into a detail and regularly washed the street with detergent. Israeli planes overhead, guerrillas running around, and he was out washing the street. Not exactly one's image of anarchy.

Even in talking to the people who did good deeds—the real heroes of the summer, like the Red Cross volunteers—one finds that they did not do what they did out of pure altruism, but rather out of a desire to keep structure and meaning in their own private lives.

—Thomas L. Friedman,

"Living With the Violence of Beirut,"

THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE,

July 17, 1983, pp. 17-18.

No. 12 "Taxes are only a small part of the price we pay for government."

If history teaches us anything it teaches that where we find liberty and free markets we find wonderful prosperity, and where we find large, powerful governments we find catastrophe. Taxes are only a small part of the price we pay for government. A much larger part is inflations, crashes, depressions, hoaxes and wars. Ever since the invention of the state thousands of years ago humans have been paying this awful price, and all I am forecasting is that we will continue to do so. History repeats. ... Political power corrupts. Governments will continue doing to us what they've been doing for 6,000 years and, as always, some of us will suffer losses while others profit.

—Richard Maybury,

EARLY WARNING REPORT, May 1996, p. 1

(Box 1616-Q, Rocklin, CA 95677).

No. 4 "THE RADICAL INDIVIDUALIST"

"The Defacto Bill of Rights", which appeared on p. 4 of Whole No. 79 of THE VOLUNTARYIST, was first written by Jeffrey Deboo, editor and publisher of THE RADICAL INDIVIDUALIST. Single issues of this publication are \$4.00 postpaid and may be obtained from the editor at 1442-A Walnut Street #64, Berkeley CA 94709.

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make such choices as where and how to live. By state power, he meant the actual amount of control the government exercises over its subjects' lives—that is, the extent to which it determines such choices as where and how people live. There is an inverse and antagonistic relationship between social and state power. One expands only at the expense of the other.

I stress the word “actual” because the power of the state does not rest on its size—the number of laws on the books or the extent of the territory it claims. A state's power rests on social conditions, such as whether people will obey its laws and how many resources it can command to enforce obedience. A key social condition is how legitimate the state is seen to be. For without the veil of legitimate authority, the people will not obey the state, and it will not long command the resources, such as taxes and manpower, that it needs to live.

In other words, freedom does not depend so much on repealing laws as weakening the state's authority. It does not depend—as political strategists expediently claim—on persuading enough people to vote “properly” so that libertarians can occupy seats of political power and roll back legislation. Unfortunately, this process strengthens the institutional framework that produced unjust laws in the first place: it strengthens the structure of state power by accepting its authority as a tool of change. But state authority can never strengthen social power.

This brings up the issue of institutional analysis. People apply the word “institution” to such wide-ranging concepts as “the family,” “the free market,” “the church,” and “the state.” An institution is any stable and widely-accepted mechanism for achieving social and political goals. To a great extent, these institutions function independently of the good or bad intentions of those who use them. For example, as long as everyone respects the rules of the free market, it functions as a mechanism of exchange. The same is true of the state. As long as everyone respects its rules—voting, going through state channels, obeying the law—it functions as a mechanism of social control.

F.A. Hayek popularized the notion of *unintended consequences*, observing that conscious acts often produce unforeseen results. This explains why good men who act through bad institutions will produce bad results. Good men acting through the state will strengthen its legitimacy and its institutional framework. They will weaken social power. Ultimately, whether or not they repeal any particular law becomes as irrelevant to producing freedom as their intentions.

So, returning to the question of voting for Hitler:



purely for the sake of argument, I'll grant the possibility that I could morally cast a ballot. Yet even then, I would still refuse to vote against him. Why? Because the essential problem is not Hitler, but the institutional framework that allows a Hitler to grasp a monopoly on power. Without the state to back him up and an election to give him legitimized power, Hitler would have been, at most, the leader of some ragged thugs who mugged people in back alleys. Voting for or against Hitler would only strengthen the institutional framework that produced him—a framework that would produce another of his ilk in two seconds.

Killing Hitler does less damage. But it—like voting—is an admission of utter defeat. Resorting to brute force means that all avenues of social power have been destroyed and I have been reduced to adopting the tactics of the state. Under tyranny, such violence might be justified as long as I could avoid harming innocent third parties. In these circumstances, however, voting could not be justified, because there is a third party. No one has the right to place one human being in a position of political power over another. A consistent libertarian can never authorize one human being to tax and control peaceful activities. And the state is no more than the institutionalized embodiment of this authorization.

You cannot help freedom or social power by bowing your head to Leviathan. ▣

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Why I Would Not Vote Against Hitler

by Wendy McElroy

At the last Liberty Conference, an intellectual brawl erupted during a panel discussion on terrorism. Since I consider electoral politics the milquetoast equivalent of terrorism, my opening statement was a condemnation of voting. My arguments were aimed at libertarians who consider themselves anarchists yet jump to their feet in ebullient applause upon hearing that a fellow libertarian wants to be a politician.

In the two raucous hours that ensued, a question was posed: "If you could have cast the deciding vote against Hitler, would you have done so?" I replied, "No, but I would have no moral objection to putting a bullet through his skull." In essence, I adopted a stronger line—a "plumbline," as Benjamin Tucker phrased it—on eliminating the Hitler threat.

I consider such a bullet to be an act of self-defense in a manner that a ballot could never be. A bullet can be narrowly aimed at a deserving target; a ballot attacks innocent third parties who must endure the consequences of the politician I have assisted into a position of power over their lives. Whoever puts a man into a position of unjust power—that is, a position of political power—must share responsibility for every right he violates thereafter.

The question then shifted: "If there had been no other strategies possible, would you have voted against Hitler?" This postulated a fantasy world which canceled out one of the basic realities of existence: the constant presence of alternatives. In essence, the question became, "If the fabric of reality were rewoven into a different pattern, would you still take the same moral stand?" Since my morals are derived from my views about reality, it was not possible for me to answer this question. But my first response was to wonder what I would have been doing for the months and years that led to the momentous dilemma of whether to scratch an X beside Adolf's name. Or did I have no alternatives then either?

I can address only the reality in which I live and, in a world replete with alternatives, I would not vote for or against Hitler. Let me address a more fundamental question: What is the nature of the state? According to Max Weber, a state is an institution that claims a monopoly of force over a geographical area. It is a form of institutionalized power, and the first step in dissecting its essence is to analyze the defining terms "power" and "institution."

Albert Jay Nock wrote of two sorts of power: social and state. By social power, he meant the amount of freedom individuals *actually* exercise over their lives—that is, the extent to which they can freely

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