
The Voluntaryist

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

April 2000

Is Voting an Act of Violence?

By Carl Watner

This short article was sparked by my work on a forthcoming anthology on non-voting, tentatively titled **THE NON-VOTERS ARE RIGHT!** Hans Sherrer, a subscriber to **THE VOLUNTARYIST**, sent me an essay entitled "Voting Is An Act of Violence," which began with the statement "Voting is the most violent act someone can commit in his lifetime." How true is this?

First, let us define our terms.

The kind of voting referred to in this article is electoral voting, meaning the act of choosing a particular person for a particular political office. To vote in an electoral election (federal, state, or local) one must first register (after meeting certain age and residency requirements) with the appropriate governmental agency. Then on a given day, all registered voters are given the opportunity to make their choices (in secret) at a government polling place. At the conclusion of the day, the votes are tallied, and the person who received the most votes for that political office is deemed the winner, and eventually sworn into office.

The kind of violence referred to in this article is physical force (shooting guns with intent to kill or maim, imprisoning recalcitrants, confiscating property) exercised by employees or agents of the state (policemen, court marshals, militia men, and soldiers) who wield this force against those who disobey State laws and regulations (referred to as "refuseniks," later in this paper). Usually the threat of arrest and imprisonment is enough to make most people docile and obedient; but the ultimate sanction held by the State and its personnel is "death" to those who refuse to cooperate. The most recent and prominent examples of these deaths are Randy Weaver's wife and child, those incinerated at Waco, and John Singer, the Mormon homeschooler, shot by a Utah "law enforcement" officer in January 1979.

Now what connection is there between electoral voting and those who act violently in the name of the State? Why does the State want large numbers of people to participate in electoral voting? There are two primary reasons for this. First, those who act in the name of the State can use the fact that many people vote as evidence that they are acting in the name of "the people." Widespread voting is cited as evidence of "consent." State agents, such as legislators, presidents, and judges need an aura of legitimacy if their actions are to be viewed as right and

proper by a large majority of the population. Second, governments - especially democratic ones - have discovered that as the proportion of the citizenry which holds the government in esteem increases, the less force the government requires to keep the balance of the population (those who view the government as illegitimate) under control. In other words, the more legitimacy that a government attains the less it needs to exercise outright violence against its opponents. A government which continually had to resort to violence to achieve its ends would soon be seen for exactly what it was: a criminal gang.

So, given that a successful State requires legitimacy and that one of the easiest ways to achieve legitimacy is through widespread voter participation, what is the responsibility of the voters for the actions of its government?

By voting, it is clear that each voter endorses the governmental system under which he or she lives. By the act of voting, each voter is saying: It is right and proper for some people, acting in the name of the State, to pass laws and to use violence to compel obedience to those laws if they are not obeyed.

Clearly, the voter—by pulling down a handle in a voting booth—has not used violence personally. Voting is not the same as pulling the trigger on a gun pointed at a refusenik. The voter has not used force, any more than a lawmaker, president, or judge does when they pass or sign a law, or issue a judicial decree. Yet all of these people have either supported or participated in a system of governance which ultimately results in people being bullied or forced into obedience.

In legal parlance, we would have to say that the voters, office holders, and other participants in government have "aided and abetted" (incited, encouraged, countenanced) the police, soldiers, and jailers who actually commit the physical aggression required in order to bring about submission of the refuseniks. Various war crime tribunal decisions since World War II have established that both elected officials and dictatorial heads of state are legally responsible for the commission of crimes that are committed under their orders, but not by their own hands. In other words, those giving the instructions to soldiers to kill innocent civilians are responsible, even though they do not personally hold the weapons or pull the triggers. Although this principle of liability has never been extended backwards from political leaders to those who participate in elections, it should be clear from this analysis that the chain of respon-

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Potpourri from the Editor's Desk

No. 1 "Without Politics: Separate and Free"

The following excerpts were written by Paul Weyrich, President of the Free Congress Foundation (717 Second Street SE, Washington DC 20002). They originally appeared in a public letter of February 16, 1999, and in an "Outlook" article in THE WASHINGTON POST, March 7, 1999. Despite Weyrich's incomplete rejection of political and electoral methods, his realization that "politics has failed" has many voluntaryist implications.

"... In looking at the long history of conservative politics, from the defeat of Robert Taft in 1952, to the nomination of Barry Goldwater, to the takeover of the Republican Party in 1994, I think it is fair to say that conservatives have learned to succeed in politics. That is, we got our people elected.

"But that did not result in the adoption of our agenda. The reason, I think, is that politics itself has failed. And politics has failed because of the collapse of the culture. The culture we are living in becomes an ever-wider sewer. In truth, I think we are caught up in a cultural collapse of historic proportions, a collapse so great that it simply overwhelms politics.

"That's why I am in the process of rethinking what it is that we, who still believe in our traditional, Western, Judeo-Christian culture, can and should do under the circumstances. Please understand that I am not quarreling with anybody who pursues politics, because it is important to pursue politics, to be involved in government. It is also important to try, as many people have, to re-take the cultural institutions that have been captured by the other side.

"But it is impossible to ignore the fact that the United States is becoming an ideological state. The ideology of Political Correctness, which openly calls for the destruction of our traditional culture, has so gripped the body politic, has so gripped our institutions, that it is even affecting the Church. It has completely taken over the academic community. It is now pervasive in the entertainment industry, and it threatens to con-

trol literally every aspect of our lives. ...

"[T]he United States is very close to becoming a state totally dominated by an alien ideology, an ideology bitterly hostile to Western culture. ... [W]hat Americans ... found absolutely intolerable only a few years ago, a majority now not only tolerates but celebrates. ... I do not believe that a majority of Americans actually shares our values. ...

"I believe that we probably have lost the culture war. That doesn't mean that the war is not going to continue, and that it isn't going to be fought on other fronts. But in terms of society in general, we have lost. This is why, even when we win in politics, our victories fail to translate into the kinds of policies we believe are important. ...

"So what is to be done? Continuing with a strategy that has failed is folly and guarantees defeat. Instead of attempting to use politics to retake existing institutions, my proposal is that we cultural conservatives build new institutions for ourselves: schools, universities, media, entertainment, everything - a complete, separate, parallel structure. In every respect but politics, we should, in effect, build a new nation among the ruins of the old.

"As to politics, of course cultural conservatives should remain engaged. If we do not, the cultural Marxists can and undoubtedly will mobilize the full force of the state to destroy us. Like all ideologies, political correctness has totalitarian ambitions, as can be seen on many a university campus.

"What we are changing is what we expect from politics and, therefore, what we put into it. In a strategy of separation, politics is defensive. The object is to prevent government from taking certain actions, actions designed to destroy freedom and impose ideology. Thanks to our system of separation of powers, it is much easier to stop something through politics than to achieve something through politics. Once again we see the wisdom of the Founders and of their profound distrust of government.

"The bulk of cultural conservatives' energies should go elsewhere, into creating the parallel institutions we need. An excellent example of what can be achieved this way is the home schooling movement. Had the parents of the million children now being home-schooled kept their kids in the public schools and fought the battles over values and standards in the curriculum, they would have lost. Those children would have received a poor education. Worse, they would have been inculcated with the "attitudes"

Statement of Purpose

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

required by political correctness, which is what most public schools now see as their main function. Instead, because they have been schooled at home, a million children have gotten good educations and learned the sound values inherent in our traditional culture. They provide solid hope for the future. ...

"The same thing is happening in other areas. Some people are getting rid of their televisions. Others are setting up private courts, where they can hope to find justice instead of ideology and greed. ...

"It is not only political conservatives who are troubled by the disintegration of the culture. I gave a speech not long ago in which I was very critical of what was on television. Several people who described themselves as liberals came up to me and said, 'Well, I know I don't agree with your politics, but you are absolutely correct on this and we don't allow our children to watch television any more.' ...

"I think that we have to look at a whole series of possibilities for bypassing the institutions that are controlled by the enemy. If we expend our energies on fighting on the 'turf' they already control, we will probably not accomplish what we hope, and we may spend ourselves to the point of exhaustion. The promising thing about a strategy of separation is that it has more to do with who *we* are, and what *we* become, than it does with what the other side is doing and what we are going to do about it. ...

"Don't be misled by politicians who say that everything is great, that we are on the verge of this wonderful, new era thanks to technology or the stock market or whatever. These are lies. We are not in the dawn of a new civilization, but the twilight of an old one. We will be lucky if we escape with any remnants of the great Judeo-Christian civilization that we have known down through the ages.

"The radicals of the 1960s had three slogans: turn on, tune in, drop out. I suggest that we adopt a modified version. First, turn off. Turn off the television and video games and some of the garbage that's on computers. Turn off the means by which you and your family are being infected with cultural decadence.

"Tune out. Create a little stillness. ...

"Finally, we need to drop out of this culture, and find places, even if it is where we physically are right now, where we can live godly, righteous and sober lives.

"Again, I don't have all the answers or even all the questions. But I know that what we have been doing for thirty years hasn't worked, that while we have been fighting and winning in politics, our culture has decayed into something approaching barbarism. We need to take another tack, find a different strategy. ..." [Let's try separate and free.]

No. 2 "A Prophecy Come True!"

"[I]n a free government almost all other rights would become utterly worthless if the government possessed an uncontrolled power over the private fortune of every citizen."

Editor's Comments: No government is "free;" some are just less arbitrary and despotic than others. The main point, however, is well-taken: Private property is the wellspring of freedom and liberty. This statement was written by Judge Joseph Story in his **COMMENTARIES ON THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES** (Boston: Hilliard, Gray and Company, 1833) vol. 3, p. 664.

No. 3 "Constitutional Implications"

The United States Constitution was written with a provision "forbidding the states from enacting any law 'impairing the obligation of contracts'." By implication, this power was left to the federal government which has used it. Enforcement of federal legal tender laws are a prime example of "impairing the obligation of contracts."

No. 4 "Free Market Potatoes!"

J. R. Simplot's business was sorting potatoes. You see, before potatoes can be sent to market, someone has to throw out those that are too small or deformed or otherwise inferior. This wastes a lot of time and a lot of potatoes, but Simplot discovered that although such potatoes may be poor for some uses, they are just fine for others.

As George Gilder tells the story in his book **RECAPTURING THE SPIRIT OF ENTERPRISE**, Simplot learned of a process to produce dried potato flakes, that is, instant mashed potatoes. He immediately saw two benefits: dried foods are cheaper and easier to store and transport, and the whole potato crop becomes usable. He grasped the opportunity for increased efficiency and invested all he could in the appropriate equipment. The industry boomed and everyone involved prospered—from the farmers to the distributors to the consumers. In this way, Simplot created wealth that had not existed before.

Hence, we see another great virtue of capitalism: It provides the framework and incentives for people to create wealth. Wealth is created when someone mixes human capital and natural resources either to produce a new product or to produce an existing product more efficiently, just as Simplot combined a new technology and a previously wasted resource to create a new and useful product.

It is crucial that those concerned about economic justice understand this aspect of capitalism. Rather than viewing wealth as a static "economic pie" to be divided up among a few, capitalism provides a way to "grow the pie" and, in this way, to provide economic opportunities for many more.

-Fr. Robert Sirico in the September 1999, **ACTON NOTES** (161 Ottawa NW, Grand Rapids MI 49503)

No. 5 "The Non-Voters Are Right!"

In cooperation with McFarland & Co., a publisher in Jefferson, NC. I am putting, together an anthology on non-voting. It is to be published in late 2000.

One of the pieces that will be included is Chapter 4, "On Underwriting an Evil," from Frank Chodorov's OUT OF STEP. This piece was previously reprinted in Whole No. 99 of THE VOLUNTARYIST, with a note that the copyright holder could not be located. To set the record straight: Devin-Adair Publisher is still in business selling books by Chodorov and others. The book is currently in print and available from them at 6 North Water Street, Greenwich CT 06830. Cost of the hardback is \$12.95. They publish other titles on "National and World Affairs" and "Classic Conservatism." Tel.: 203-531-7755.

No. 6 "Is Public Education Necessary?"

The answer is obvious: it was not needed then, and it is certainly not needed today. Schools are necessary, but they can be created by free enterprise today as they were before the public school movement achieved its fraudulent state monopoly in education. Subject education to the same competitive market forces that other goods and services are subjected to, and we shall see far better education at much lower overall cost. Instead of a "crusade against ignorance" to reform the world, we shall have schools capable of performing the limited and practical functions that schools were originally created to perform.

The failure of public education is the failure of statism as a political philosophy. It has been tried. It has been found sorely wanting. Having learned from our mistakes, would it not be better to return to the basic principles upon which this nation was founded? Education was not seen then as the cure-all for mankind's moral diseases. But it was on that premise that the reformers built the present system. They were wrong. The system cannot work because in a free society government has no more place in education than it has in religion. Once Americans grasp the full significance of this idea, they will understand why the return of educational freedom is essential to the preservation and expansion of American freedom in general.

—Samuel L. Blumenfeld, Old Greenwich: The Devin-Adair Company, 1981, p. 249. ▣

Is Voting an Act of Violence?

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sibility extends from those who exercise the actual violence, to those who give the orders that the violence be used, to those who participate in elections which result in those political leaders being elected.

Now let us return to the initial question of this article: What truth is there to the statement that "Voting is the most violent act someone can commit in his lifetime."? Let this question be answered by assuming that one is not a serial murderer or does not engage in any type of overt criminal activity. In other words, let us assume that most people who vote in electoral elections otherwise lead peaceful, innocent lives. Is voting the most violent act that they will

commit in their lifetimes? Based on the argument in this article, the answer must be "Yes." Each person, by voting, sanctions the violence used by agents of the State. The link in the chain of responsibility for that violence surrounds each voter when he pulls down the lever in the voting booth. Voting is an act of presumptive violence because each voter assumes the right to appoint a political guardian over other human beings. No individual voter or even a majority of voters have such a right. If they claim to possess such a right, let them clearly explain where that right comes from and how it squares with the self-evident truths of the Declaration of Independence "that all men are created equal, [and] that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights" of "Life, Liberty," and Property.

It was with good reason that Henry David Thoreau in his essay on "Civil Disobedience" called for a total abstinence from the ballot box. "When the subject has refused allegiance, and the officer has resigned his office, then the revolution is accomplished." ▣

The Superiority of Moral Power Over Political Power

By Adin Ballou

What is *moral power*? The power which operates on the affections, passions, reason, and moral sentiment of mankind, and thereby *controls* them without *physical force*. It comprehends every description of influence, which, without *applying or threatening* to apply *physical coercion*, tends to determine the *will, conduct* and character of human beings.

What is *political power*? The power of the *State, body politic, or civil government*, operating under the forms of law, and *compelling or threatening* to compel subjection to its requirements by *physical force*. It comprehends every description of influence founded on the authority of the *State* which either *applies or threatens* to apply *physical coercion*.

Taking these *two powers*, as they exist in this country, and as they are available to philanthropists and moral reformers, let us *contrast* them. We affirm that moral power is superior.

1. *In respect to their general objects.*

It is the object of moral power to regenerate public sentiment - to superinduce a right *public opinion* and WILL in the great mass of the people. It is the object of political power to *overawe* and *coerce* by *penal laws*, delinquent and refractory *individuals*. — Moral power converts the majority to righteousness in spite of ten thousand difficulties. Political power expresses the new public will in the form of *laws*, and by physical force, *applied or threatened*, overawes the minority and coerces the unwilling few into apparent subjection. Moral power does ninety-nine one-hundredths of the work, and political power, in its official robes, with a half-unsheathed sword at its

side, follows after, claiming all the credit. Which is superior?

2. *In respect to the numbers who exercise them, moral power is superior.*

Moral power is exercised by every human being, in a greater or lesser degree, and is reflected from every created thing. It is vested in the patriarch and the new born babe; in the prince and the beggar; in the philosopher and the idiot. ... Moral power is everywhere, in all things. It is exercised by, or at least reflected from, the innumerable hosts of human nature.



But political power is exercised by only a handful of human beings. It is vested, nominally, in the voting citizens, and exercised by their chosen representatives in the several departments of government. And who are the voting citizens? Exclude all females, all minors under twenty-one years of age, all paupers and persons under guardianship, all slaves, all unnaturalized foreigners, and many others for want of the requisite property qualification. The residue will be voting citizens, amounting to less than ONE FOURTH of the whole nation. Deduct from these the sick, helpless, indifferent, and scrupulously conscientious against voting, and the average proportion of actual voters to the mass, will be as one to six, or more likely, as one to ten. Of these, there must be a majority to determine any important issue. The party constituting the majority furnishes nearly all the offices of government, and is itself managed in all its principal doings by a subtle few behind the curtain. The whole political power in this country is virtually in the hands of less than one fiftieth part of the people. A bushel of wheat in a mountain of straw and chaff.

3. *In respect to the prominent details of their operation, moral power is superior.*

Moral power unites male and female in marriage, multiplies human beings, subdues the earth, increases wealth, forms neighborhoods, and builds cities. Political power takes the census, levies taxes, trains soldiers to do its fighting, and assumes the office of protecting the people. Moral power educates the people, intellectually, religiously, morally, socially, and industrially. Political power tickles their ambition, uses up their faculties, consumes their substance, and punishes a few of their grosser crimes. ...

4. *In respect to their instrumentalities, moral power is superior.*

Look at the number and efficiency of those influences which moral power is every where employing to enlighten and improve mankind. Though many of them are sadly perverted, and need to be rightly directed, yet from their peculiar nature, endless variety, and universal activity, they are capable of producing stupendous results. There is Religion ... Next comes education ... and literature ... and the *influence of women*. ... Such are the instrumentalities of moral power. ... In the face of all this, let political power look up and present its vaunted resources: Oh! its swords, its muskets, its cannons, its powder and ball, ... its prisons; ... its courts; ... its congresses, ...! all crying like the daughters of the horse leech, 'Give! give! office and salary! Mighty, as the political power is, in physical force and money; terrible as it is sometimes in vengeance, what is it compared to moral power? ...

5. *In respect to priority and independence of action moral power is superior.*

Moral power is natural, spontaneous, and independent in its action. It originates ideas, feelings, sentiments and *changes* of human conduct. It not only operates *without* but *against* political power; and obliges political power to conform to its dictates. As an illustration, look at the rise and triumph of the Christian religion. It had no political power. It was a babe in a manger. Political power slew fourteen thousand innocents to make sure of its destruction. But it survived and grew up to maturity. ... What important change was ever brought about for the public good by political power alone? It originates no such changes. It never thinks of making any such changes, till moral power has suggested them, and prepared the public mind to acquiesce in them! Political power is *artificial, mechanical*, and incapable of doing anything good, without the creative, preparative, and sustaining influence of moral power.

6. *In respect to their freedom and elasticity moral power is superior.*

Moral power is not restricted to times, plans [?], and set forms. It is not confined to certain classes of persons, within certain lines of latitude and longitude, nor to particular cases of conduct and character. ... It is at home everywhere, among all human beings, at all times

Congress



"Hey, you don't have to fool all the people—just the ones on your jury."

and places. Not so with political power. It is restricted on every side by Constitutions, laws, regulations, precedents, formalities, and usages. ...

7. *In serious other respects moral power is superior.*

Moral power operates through all its multiform processes, and accomplishes its magnificent results with little show, and at its *own expense*. Political power puts on its robes, sounds a trumpet, and parades its machinery before the public eye, at the expense of the public. It taxes them as heavily as they will bear, compels them to pay ..., and takes care to secure to itself an ample remuneration. ... They who are fortunate enough to keep clear of political power are fortunate indeed.

Again. Moral power, being unostentatious and disinterested, exerts a purifying and ennobling influence on the character of its votaries. ... But political power has the contrary tendency. It generally renders its devotees more selfish, corrupt, hollow-hearted and tyrannical. Many a decently good man has gone into the labyrinth of politics, and held office to his own moral ruin. And where is there one that ever came out more fit for the kingdom of heaven; unless driven by disgust from its sorceries? It requires no ordinary virtue to maintain one's moral integrity against the seductions of political power.

Finally. Moral power has devised and accomplished nearly all the good that has been done among mankind since the foundation of the world. It has discovered, invented, and perfected, all manner of improvements - mechanical, chemical, intellectual,

social moral, and religious ... It has done most of these mighty works in poverty and solitude, with little or no countenance from political power or its worshippers, and not unfrequently in spite of their most deadly opposition. On the other hand, political power seldom patronizes the benefactors of their race till they are quite able to take care of themselves. It generally starves, crucifies, or stones them, and afterwards erects monuments to their memories; ...

[Editor's Note: Adin Ballou (1803-1890) was an American clergyman, pacifist, abolitionist, and president (1841-1851) of the utopian community, Hopedale. This piece was first published in the ANTI-SLAVERY BUGLE of New Lisbon, Ohio on June 20, 1845. In his final remarks, which are not included here, Ballou admits that there is such a thing as wise coercion of the "few that may need coercion," and that "political power is not *per se* necessarily evil." Nevertheless he concludes this article with the admonition: "Let those who are called to testify against the iniquities of the land, and to regenerate its corrupt public sentiment, adhere closely to their work, and be careful never to endorse *politically* the very errors, falsehoods, and vices, which they *morally* rebuke."] ▣

Against Woman Suffrage

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resort bayonets, to enforce obedience.

There is another class of men, who are devoured by ambition, by the love of power, and the love of fame.

They think it a very glorious thing to rule over men; to make laws to govern them. But as they have no power of their own to compel obedience, they unite with the rapacious class before mentioned, and become their tools. They promise to *make such laws* as the rapacious class desire, if this latter class will but authorize them to act in their name, and furnish the money and the soldiers necessary for carrying their laws, so called, into execution.

Still another class of men, with a sublime conceit of their own wisdom, or virtue, or religion, think they have a right, and a sort of divine authority, for *making laws* to govern those who, they think, are less wise, or less virtuous, or less religious than themselves. They assume to know what is best for all other men to do and not to do, to be and not to be, to have and not to have. And they conspire to *make laws to compel* all those other men to conform to their will, or, as they would say, to their superior discretion. They seem to have no perception of the truth that each and every human being has had given to him a mind and body of his own, separate and distinct from the minds and bodies of all other men; and that each man's mind and body have, by nature, rights that are utterly separate and distinct from the rights of any and all other men; that these individual rights are really the only *human rights* there are in the

world, that each man's rights are simply the right to control his own soul, and body, and property, according to his own will, pleasure, and discretion, so long as he does not interfere with the equal right of any other man to the free exercise and control of his own soul, body, and property. They seem to have no conception of the truth that, so long as he lets all other men's souls, bodies, and properties alone, he is under no obligation whatever to believe in such wisdom, or virtue, or religion as they do, or as they think best for him.

This body of self-conceited wise, virtuous, and religious people, not being sufficiently powerful of themselves to *make laws* and enforce them upon the rest of mankind, combine with the rapacious and ambitious classes before mentioned to carry out such purposes as they can all agree upon. And the farce, and jargon, and babel they all make of what they call government would be supremely ludicrous and ridiculous, if it were not the cause of nearly all the poverty, ignorance, vice, crime, and misery there are in the world.

Of this latter class—that is, the self-conceited wise, virtuous, and religious class—are those woman suffrage persons who are so anxious that women should participate in all the falsehood, absurdity, usurpation, and crime of *making laws*, and enforcing them upon other persons. It is astonishing what an amount of wisdom, virtue, and knowledge they propose to inflict upon, or force into, the rest of mankind, if they can but be permitted to participate with the men in *making laws*. According to their own promises and predictions, there will not be a single natural human being left upon the globe, if the women can but get hold of us, and add their power to that of the men in making such laws as nobody has any right to make, and such as nobody will be under the least obligation to obey. According to their programme, we are to be put into their legislative mill, and be run through, ground up, worked over, and made into some shape in which we shall be scarcely recognized as human beings. Assuming to be gods, they propose to make us over into their own image. But there are so many different images among them, that we can have, at most, but one feature after one model, and another after another. What the whole conglomerate human animal will be like, it is impossible to conjecture.

In all conscience, is it not better for us even to bear the nearly unbearable ills inflicted upon us by the laws already made,—at any rate is it not better for us to be (if we can but be permitted to be) such simple human beings as Nature made us,—than suffer ourselves to be made over into such grotesque and horrible shapes as a new set of lawmakers would make us into, if we suffer them to try their powers upon us?

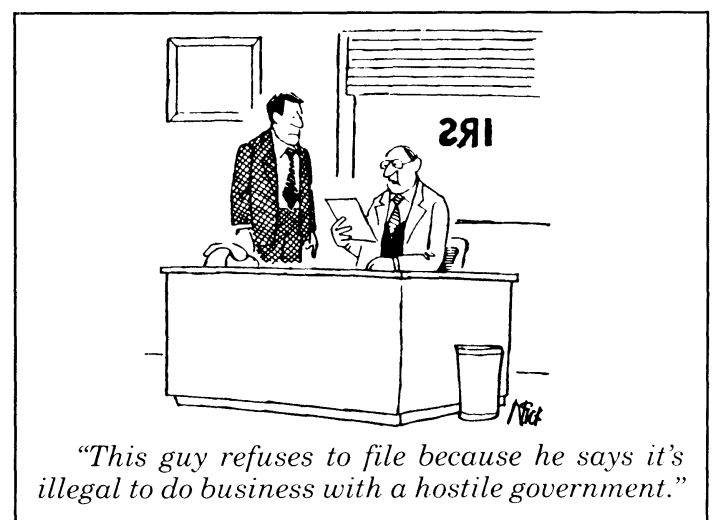
The excuse which the women offer for all the laws which they propose to inflict upon us is that they

themselves are oppressed by the laws that now exist. Of course they are oppressed; and so are all men—except the oppressors themselves—oppressed by the laws that are *made*. As a general rule, oppression was the only motive for which laws were ever *made*. If men wanted justice, and only justice, no laws would ever need to be *made*; since justice itself is not a thing that can be *made*. If men or women, or men and women, want justice, and only justice, their true course is *not to make any more laws, but to abolish the laws—all the laws—that have already been made*. When they shall have abolished all the laws that have already been *made*, let them give themselves to the study and observance, and, if need be, the enforcement, of that one universal law—the law of Nature—which is “the same at Rome and Athens”—in China and in England—and which *man did not make*. Women and men alike will then have their rights; all their rights; *all the rights that Nature gave them*. But until then, neither men nor women will have anything that they can call their *rights*. They will at most have only such liberties or privileges as the laws that are made shall see fit to allow them.

If the women, instead of petitioning to be admitted to a participation in the power of *making more laws*, will but give notice to the present lawmakers that they (the women) are going up to the State House, and are going to throw all the existing statute books in the fire, they will do a very sensible thing,—one of the most sensible things it is in their power to do. And they will have a crowd of men—at least all the sensible and honest men in the country to go with them.

But this subject requires a treatise, and is not to be judged of by the few words here written. Nor is any special odium designed to be cast on the woman suffragists, many of whom are undoubtedly among the best and most honest of all those foolish people who believe that laws should be *made*.

[AGAINST WOMAN SUFFRAGE was originally published in J. M. L. Babcock's periodical, *NEW AGE*, February 24, 1877 and later reprinted in Benjamin R. Tucker's *Liberty*, June 10, 1882.] ▣



Against Woman Suffrage

By Lysander Spooner

Women are human beings, and consequently have all the natural rights that any human beings can have. They have just as good a right to make laws as men have, and no better. AND THAT IS JUST NO RIGHT AT ALL. 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 the masters and owners of those of whom they require such obedience.

The only law that any human being can rightfully be *compelled* to obey is simply the law of justice. And justice is not a thing that is *made*, or that can be unmade, or altered, by any human authority. It is a *natural* principle, inhering in the very nature of man and of things. It is that natural principle which determines what is mine and what is thine, what is one man's right or property and what is another man's right or property. It is, so to speak, the line that Nature has drawn between one man's rights of person and property and another man's rights of person and property.

But for this line, which Nature has drawn separating the rights of one man from the rights of any and all other men, no human being could be said to have any rights whatever. Every human being would be at the mercy of any and all other human beings who were stronger than he.

This natural principle, which we will call justice, and which assigns to each and every human being his or her rights, and separates them from the rights of each and every other human being, is, I repeat, not a thing that man has *made*, but is a matter of science to be learned, like mathematics, or chemistry, or geology. And all the *laws*, so called, that men have ever *made*, either to create, define, or control the rights of individuals, were intrinsically just as absurd and ridiculous as would be laws to create, define, or control mathematics, or chemistry, or geology.

Substantially all the tyranny and robbery and crime that governments have ever committed—and they have either themselves committed, or licensed others to commit, nearly all that have ever been committed in the world by anybody—have been committed by them under the pretence of *making laws*. Some man, or some body of men, have claimed the right, or usurped the power, of *making laws*, and compelling other men to obey; thus setting up their own will, and enforcing it, in place of that natural law, or natural principle, which says that no man or body of men can rightfully exercise any arbitrary power whatever over the persons or property of other men.

There are a large class of men who are so rapacious that they desire to appropriate to their own uses the persons and properties of other men. They combine for the purpose, call themselves governments, *make what they call laws*, and then employ courts, and governors, and constables, and, in the last

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