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# The Voluntaryist

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

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## Voluntaryist Resistance

By Carl Watner

[Author's Introduction of February 2004: This hit-and-erto unpublished essay was first written in January 1983, and then revised in May of that same year.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

### Introduction

The Voluntaryists are advocates of non-political strategies to achieve a free society. We reject electoral politics, both in theory and practice, as incompatible with libertarian principles. Governments must cloak their actions in an aura of moral legitimacy in order to sustain their power, and political methods invariably strengthen that legitimacy. Voluntaryists seek instead to delegitimize the State through education, and we advocate withdrawal of the cooperation and tacit consent on which State power ultimately depends. Voluntaryists are exclusively committed to using nonviolent strategies to oppose the State. The purpose of this paper is to show why this commitment is a function of voluntaryism and how voluntaryist resistance differs from conventional nonviolence theory.

### I. What Is Voluntaryism?

Voluntaryism is a dual doctrine: the beliefs that a) all human interactions should be voluntary; and b) that the State is an inherently coercive institution, and therefore undeserving of any support. The voluntaryist understanding of the relationship between means and ends precludes both the use of electoral politics and violence. This is the distinguishing mark of voluntaryists, that we are, at once, both non-violent and nonelectoral.

Voluntaryism is at once an end, a means, and an insight. It signifies the goal of an all voluntary society, one in which all interaction between individuals is based on voluntary exchange, and thus calls for the abolition of the State. Voluntaryism represents a way of achieving significant social change without resort to politics or violent revolution. Since voluntaryists recognize that government rests on mass acquiescence (the voluntaryist insight), they conclude that the only way to abolish government power is for the people at large to withdraw their cooperation. As

a means, voluntaryism calls for peaceful persuasion, education, individual civil disobedience, and group nonviolent resistance to the State. Since voluntaryists see a direct connection between the means they use and the end they seek, they realize that only voluntary means can be used to attain the truly voluntary society. People cannot be coerced into being free. The very goal of an all voluntary society suggests its own means. The voluntaryist insight provides the only logical and consistent way of achieving liberty and abolishing the State.

### II. The Voluntaryist Insight

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

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

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

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

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# The Voluntaryist

Editor: Carl Watner

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## Birth Certificates and the Law

By Carl Watner

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

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

In stateless societies birth certificates would generally be a private or religious matter. Parents might choose to make a private or church record of the births of their children, or they may choose to make none at all. Only since the rise of the nation-state in the later Middle Ages has it occurred to anyone that there might be a reason to have governments document human births. In many areas of the world, for many centuries before the official beginning of the United States there was never any requirement that births be registered with the political authorities. Under such circumstances, it was never a crime not to report or register a birth. When it did become a

crime, one might have asked: Who has been harmed by not reporting a birth or obtaining a birth certificate for one's newborn? Failure to report a birth can thus be seen as a violation of a "political" statute, but it is clearly not a "real" crime. It is certainly not a crime against God's law or Nature's Law *not* to have a birth certificate, and that being the case, it certainly cannot be a real crime to fail to report the birth to the political authorities.

"People who play God [politicians] always do a bad job."

—Rick Maybury, EARLY WARNING REPORT, March-April 2004, p.4.

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

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

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

Parents by your actions, you make this choice for your children. ☐

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# Voluntaryist Resistance

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tion of nonviolent action. [2]

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

## III. The Means-End Insight

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

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

They say that means are after all means.

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

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

This means-end insight sheds some very interesting light on the question of gradualism vs. immediatism. For one thing, it leads to the conclusion that one must take action now in order to eventually reach a stateless society. This implies that in fact there is no transition period, or what in fact amounts to the same thing, that every period is one of transition. The important thing for voluntaryists

to do is to make a serious attempt to travel in the direction of a stateless society and not be concerned with its imminent arrival. This can only be done by people behaving now in a manner consistent with their ultimate ideal. The idea of an all voluntary society is as much of a guide to present activity as it is a future ideal. This is what is meant by saying that the means are the ends in process.

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

## IV. The Nonviolent Insight

All libertarians and voluntaryists recognize the right of self-defense, which entails the right to preserve one's self and property with whatever force is reasonably necessary against actual violence or its threat. This right to use force against aggressors stems from our self-ownership rights in our own bodies and justly owned property. Violence, however, is just one form of resistance, which allows us to oppose, defeat, and attempt to frustrate those who violate our rights.

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

Voluntaryists are not pacifists since they recognize the right of the individual to use violence in self-defense. Yet, they are often accused of offering a double standard because they advocate nonviolent resistance against the State, on the one hand, and allow for the use of violence against the common criminal. Isn't the State itself nothing but a common criminal, and therefore aren't those who have their rights violated by the State justified in reacting violently? Such critics misperceive the true nature of the State. The State can only be identified by its institutional features which render it invasive 'per se'. This is what distinguishes State aggression from common criminality. "Violence may be directed at

individuals, but when it comes to the State where is the violence to be directed?" Institutional arrangements can never be touched by violence because they are ideas carried in the minds of people practicing them. Public buildings may be destroyed, public officials murdered, but such efforts will never bring about the destruction of the idea of the State. The State is a state of mind, an idea which cannot be harmed by violence. Ideas can only be attacked with better ideas. Therefore, there is no double standard involved when voluntaryists urge the use of nonviolent resistance against the State. The individual criminal is a real person while the State is an idea, an institutional arrangement. One does not go about extirpating the State in the same way that one defends one's self from a common criminal. [7]

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

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

Voluntaryists also reject the use of electoral means as the course of changing society. Electoral politics only serves to reinforce State legitimacy. Political parties and their attempts to campaign for and hold State offices are all inconsistent with the final end of a nonpolitical society. Voting, running for office, or holding office are all counter-productive to the voluntaryist goal of delegitimizing the State. (Furthermore, there are profound questions of personal integrity involved in collecting a government salary or

swearing an oath to a government constitution.) All such efforts to wield political power are an attempt to exercise power over other people. It is precisely for this reason that voluntaryists do not view electoral politics as a form of nonviolent action.

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

### **V. Voluntaryist Resistance**

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

Violent revolution can destroy old institutions before people are ready for new ones. Voluntaryist resistance, because it rests on nonviolence, cannot do this. People will only accept nonviolent resistance as they are ready for it. Voluntaryist resistance allows people to proceed at their own pace, allows resistance to mount as educational activities enlighten people as to their "voluntary servitude". Voluntaryist resistance builds self-confidence and is a real tool

of empowerment because people realize that they can shape the course of their lives and alter long-lived institutions.

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

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

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

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

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

Thus, the one key ingredient of voluntaryist resistance is the adherence to a strict policy of nonviolence, even in the face of the utmost government brutality. Governments will want to provoke nonviolent resisters to violence in order to justify their own severe repression. However, if the resisters remain true to their nonviolence, the government is faced with

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

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

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

## **VI. Systemic Revolution and the Lessons of History**

Voluntaryism is essentially a subversive philoso-

phy because it recognizes that the enemy is not a few men and women in political office, but rather the whole political system. Voluntaryists realize that systemic revolution grows out of the disintegration of consent and not violence. Voluntaryist resistance serves to veto the actions of those in political power by engineering the withdrawal of support. Voluntaryists eschew the seizure of power because of the pregnant possibility of corruption, but nevertheless they do effect fundamental change. Voluntaryism is revolutionary in the sense that, it brings about radical change, but it is non-revolutionary in respect that it does not exercise power.

Voluntaryist resistance is essentially a control over power rather than a form of power; "a technique that is limited to limiting and destroying power," not a new group of people coming into power. [13] If the State can be used to remove our fetters, then it can be used to replace them. Voluntaryist resistance is much less likely to bring about tyranny and oppression in its wake because voluntaryists do not seek power in order to reform it. They renounce power in order to abolish it and thereby attempt to harmonize the means with the end.

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

"History knows of no totalitarian agenda where noble goals weren't used as justification."

—Walter Williams

From a voluntaryist perspective, a government only has the power to inflict that which we lack the strength to resist. The many centuries of experience with nonviolent resistance by the Quakers prove that even a small, but serious, group of nonviolent resisters can have an impact on their society far out of proportion to their numerical strength. The quality of their resistance and their ability to willfully oppose the system are what count.

The question at hand is not whether our efforts actually achieve a voluntaryist society in our lifetimes, but rather how we go about trying to achieve that noble goal. Voluntaryist success must be judged by how well one adheres to the means. "If one takes care of the means, the end will take care of itself." In the long run, from the point of view of the individual

voluntaryist, the success or failure of the movement cannot be the most important consideration. As Gandhi said, the seeker after truth must be prepared to renounce the fruit of his actions. He also added that non-cooperation with evil is a duty. Thus he argued for the performance of duty irrespective of the consequences.

How many of the Russian dissidents thought they would have any effect whatsoever on the communist system? But did that deter them from acting? As Vladimir Bukovsky, one of the dissidents, so eloquently wrote:

We had grasped the great truth that it was not rifles, not tanks, and not atom bombs that created power, nor upon them that power rested. Power depended upon public obedience, upon a willingness to submit. Therefore each individual who refused to submit to force reduced that force by one 250 millionth of its sum. ...

We weren't playing politics, we didn't compose programs for the liberation of the people, we didn't found unions. ... Our sole weapon was publicity. Not propaganda but publicity, so that no one could say afterward, "I didn't know." The rest depended on each individual's conscience. Neither did we expect victory — there wasn't the slightest hope of achieving it. But each of us craved the right to say to our descendants: "I did all that I could. I never went against my conscience." [14] ▣

## ENDNOTES

[1] Mahatma Gandhi cited by Gene Sharp, *GANDHI AS A POLITICAL STRATEGIST WITH ESSAYS ON ETHICS AND POLITICS*, (Boston: Porter Sargent Publishers, 1979), pp. 11, 33.

[2] Gene Sharp, *THE POLITICS OF NONVIOLENT ACTION* (Boston: Porter Sargent Publishers, 1973), from Part One, "Power and Struggle", p. 64.

[3] Judith Stiehm, *NONVIOLENT POWER*, ((Lexington: D.C. Heath and Co., 1972), p. 65.

[4] Mahatma Gandhi cited by Gene Sharp, *GANDHI AS A POLITICAL STRATEGIST*, op. cit. p. 290.

[5] Ronald Duncan, *SELECTED WRITINGS OF MAHATMA GANDHI*, (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1951), pp. 242-243.

[6] For an explanation of why government purposefully conflates the ideas of "law and order" see John Hasnas, "The Myth of Law and Order," *THE VOLUNTARYIST*, Whole No. 123, 4th Quarter 2004, p. 7, reprinted from John Hasnas, "The Myth of the Rule of Law," Vol. 1995, *WISCONSIN LAW REVIEW* (1995), pp. 199-233. Especially see Section XII. Excerpts from Hasnas' original article also appeared in *THE VOLUNTARYIST*, Whole Nos. 97 and 98 (1999). Other commentators have noted the society is able to exist without the State and government policemen. When the Roman empire finally came to an end in 476 A.D., "[t]he state disappeared, yet society continued." [Carroll Quigley, *TRAGEDY AND HOPE*, New York, The Macmillan Co., 1966, p. 83.] "Great part of that order which reigns among mankind is not the effect of Government. It has its origins in the principles of society and the natural constitution of man. It existed prior to Government, and would exist if the formality of Government was abolished." [Thomas Paine, *RIGHTS OF MAN* (1792), Ch. 1, Bk. 2.]



[7] If the current U.S. government were to suddenly disappear, “the present American slave mentality would only erect another system of slavery [read: government].” [Franklin Sanders, *THE MONEYCHANGER*, October 1994, pp. 3-4.] On the institutional analysis of the State, see George H. Smith, “The Ethics of Voting”, *THE VOLUNTARYIST*, Vol. I, Nos. 1, 2, and 4. Credit is also due Alan Koontz for helping to develop these ideas.

[8] Francis Tandy, *VOLUNTARY SOCIALISM*, (Denver, by the author, 1896), see Chapter XIII “Methods”, esp. pp. 186-188. Excerpts reprinted in Carl Watner (ed.), *I MUST SPEAK OUT*, San Francisco: Fox & Wilkes, 1999, pp. 57-61.

[9] Mahatma Gandhi cited by Gene Sharp, *GANDHI AS A POLITICAL STRATEGIST*, op. cit., p. 9, and by Duncan, *SELECTED WRITINGS*, op. cit., p. 60.

[10] Jerry Tinker, “The Political Power of Non-Violent Resistance: The Gandhian Technique”, 24 *WESTERN POLITICAL QUARTERLY* (1971), pp. 775-788, see pp. 786 and 789. Reprinted as “The Power of Non-Violent Resistance,” in Carl Watner (ed.), *I MUST SPEAK OUT*, San Francisco: Fox & Wilkes, 1999, pp. 69-78.

[11] Judith Stiehm, *NONVIOLENT POWER*, op. cit., p. 68. How many people ever imagined that the Soviet Union would collapse?

[12] Fred Shuttlesworth cited by Martin Luther King, Jr., *WHY WE CAN'T WAIT*, (New York: New American Library, 1964), p. 58.

[13] Stiehm, op. cit., p. 71.

[14] Vladimir Bukovsky, *TO BUILD A CASTLE - MY LIFE AS A DISSENTER*, (New York: Viking Press, 1977), pp. 33, 277.

## “So, What Is It About ‘No’ That You Don’t Understand...?”

*continued from page 8*

premise. The underlying foundation is that every act, every decision is voluntary. No one can force another person into slavery or servitude unless that person chooses to be a slave or servant. Likewise freedom is voluntary as well. No one can force you to change your mind or relinquish a position unless you volunteer to do so. Neither steel bars nor iron chains can imprison your mind. Only you can do that by failing to reason and by failing to listen to the dictates of your own heart and conscience.

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

When Alexander the Great was about to cross the Ganges River in India, he met an old sage. As Alexander questioned the sage about what he was to expect when he crossed the river with his army, the sage’s answer shocked him. It is said the old man looked Alexander straight in the eye and replied,

“You’ll never be able to conquer them.” “What! I’m Alexander the Great! I’ve got the power of the world’s greatest army behind me. Do you realize this very moment I have the power to cut your head off? Then what would you do?” Unflinchingly the old man said, “Well, then I suppose we would both watch it fall, wouldn’t we?” Alexander, changing his tone, asked “So why is it you believe those people can’t be conquered?” The wise man, looking Alexander through, retorted, “Because they don’t love money and they don’t fear death!” It is said that at that point Alexander the Great turned his armies around. Of course, I might have added, “And what is it about ‘No’ that you don’t understand?”

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

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

How far can one be pushed, how many cherished beliefs trampled upon, how many values assaulted, before the steel in one’s spine stiffens? I don’t know. Everyone is different. One day, that skinny-armed boy becomes a man with bulging biceps due to the resistance he finds in the gym. One day also comes when that young man forges and builds his philosophical edifice as his ideas, beliefs and values are tested. Testing and resistance are food for developing noble characters and the stalwart qualities that we admire in heroic men and women. Like iron filings are attracted to a magnet, men and women of purpose are drawn to high ideals. So, most naturally I was drawn to the work of Carl Watner. It is often a matter of integrity to speak out, which I did in that courtroom four decades ago. You probably now understand that as a voluntaryist, I, too, must speak out, as will some day millions of others. “This above all—to thine own self be true, And it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man.” ▣

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## **“So, What Is It About ‘No’ That You Don’t Understand...?”**

By Peter Ragnar

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

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

Well, at least that’s the impression he was trying to convey. What he did say was, “I’ve sent many a person like you to prison, and you wouldn’t be the last! Do you have anything to say for yourself?” I of-

fered my hands as if bound by the court. “You may be able to bind me, you may be able to confine me, you may be able to burn me with fire, you may be able to drown me in water or blood. You may be able to hack me to pieces and feed me to the lions, but coercion can never buy my compliance! Just what part of ‘No’ do you have a difficulty understanding?”

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

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

As I said to start with, I didn’t clearly see the

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