
The Voluntaryist

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

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On the History of the Word "Voluntaryism"

By Carl Watner

Voluntaryism has a long and rich historical tradition in the English-speaking world. Our first cite of modern usage is from WIKIPEDIA, THE FREE ENCYCLOPEDIA, found on the worldwide web:

voluntaryism - "in politics and economics ... the idea that human relations should be based on voluntary cooperation ..., to the exclusion of political compulsion..... A journal is published based on this idea: The Voluntaryist ... (<http://www.voluntaryist.com>)".¹

The NEW SHORTER OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY offers the following definitions, citing usage that dates back to the 1830s:

voluntar[y]ism - "The principle that the Church or schools should be independent of the State and supported by voluntary contributions."

voluntar[y]ist - "An advocate or adherent of voluntarism or voluntaryism."²

However, voluntaryism has roots deeper than the early 19th Century. The purpose of this article is to show the connections between 21st Century voluntaryism and its intellectual heritage, which can be traced at least as far back as the Leveller movement of mid-17th Century England. The Levellers can be best identified by their spokesmen John Lilburne (?1614-1657) and Richard Overton (?1600-?1660s) who "clashed with the Presbyterian puritans, who wanted to preserve a state-church with coercive powers and to deny liberty of worship to the puritan sects."³ All the Leveller thinkers were nonconformist religious types who agitated for the separation of church and state.

During the late 16th and 17th Centuries, the church covenant was a common means of organizing the radical religious sects. This was sometimes an explicit congregational agreement by which those enrolling in a particular church pledged themselves to the faith. The church to their way of thinking was a voluntary association of equals. To both the Levellers and later thinkers this furnished a powerful theoretical and practical model for the civil state. If it was proper for their church congregations to be based on consent, then it was proper to apply the same principle of consent to its secular counterpart. For example, the Leveller 'large' Petition of 1647 contained a proposal "that tythes and all other inforced maintenances, may be for ever abolished, and

nothing in place thereof imposed, but that all Ministers may be payd only by those who voluntarily choose them, and contract with them for their labours."⁴ One only need substitute "taxes" for "tythes" and "government officials" for "Ministers" to see how close the Levellers were to the idea of a voluntary state. The Levellers also held tenaciously to the idea of self-proprietorship. As Richard Overton wrote: "No man hath power over my rights and liberties, and I over no mans [sic]."⁵ They realized that it was impossible to assert one's private right of judgment in religious matters (what we would call today, liberty of conscience) without upholding the same right for everyone else, even the unregenerate.

These ideas were embraced in Scotland by John Glas, a Dundee minister who challenged the establishment church of the Covenanters. Glas taught that there was no Scriptural warrant for a state church, that the civil magistrate should have no authority in religious matters, and that the imposition of a creed against unbelievers was not a Christian thing.⁶ What appropriately became known as the Secession Church began when Glas and three other ministers left the Scottish state church, and formed the first Associate Presbytery in 1733, near Kinross. As W. B. Selbie wrote, "It [the Secession Church] was a Voluntary Church dependent on the free will offerings of the people, and independent of any State control."⁷

In an extensive discussion of "Voluntaryism" published in Chambers's ENCYCLOPAEDIA reference is made to the "Voluntary Controversy which sprung up in the second decade of th[e 19th] Century between churchmen and dissenters in Scotland." There the voluntaryists held "that all true worship ... must be the free expression of individual minds. ... [T]herefore, religion ought to be left by civil society to mould itself spontaneously according to its own" spiritual nature and institutions. This should be done "without violence to individual freedom from any interposition of secular authority or compulsory influence."⁸ These religious voluntaryists held that the "only weapons of the Church are moral and spiritual. The weapon of the State is force." They believed that the "Church was never so vital, so convincing, so fruitful as in the first three centuries before her alliance with the State."⁹

Back in England, from about the mid-1840s to the mid-1860s, voluntaryism became a force to be reckoned with in another sphere. In 1843, Parliament considered legislation which would have required part-time compulsory attendance at school of those children working in factories. The effective control over these schools

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See www.voluntaryist.com [V]

No. 1 "The Snake In Eden Was But the First Politician"

When the [American Revolutionary] war was over, our father, whom we had not heard from or seen for seven years, came back to claim us. That it was our father there was no doubt, though he was more in body than in mind. For seven years he had fought for the cause of Liberty, but it had, at last, cost him his soul. Without reducing his enduring hatred of all things English, he informed the world that the English Parliament had its equal only in the halls of American government. "The snake in Eden," he proclaimed, "was but the first politician." He wished to have no more contacts with governments, ... In this world all societies, all men, all governments and nations are but gangs of thieves who join together to plunder others.

—Avi, CAPTAIN GREY, New York: Bantam Skylark Edition, 1978, from Chaps. I and XI, pp. 2 and 74.

No. 2 "The Affront Is To Our Dignity, Rather Than Our Pocketbook"

"I believe coercive taxation is a disgrace to human dignity and believe that it must be resisted. I believe that our consent is manifest in our willingness to submit to taxation and not exclusively in our willingness to vote. It is a disgrace to ourselves, insofar as it violates our dignity and our conscience. Government confiscates our property and then turns it against our fellow man [as in the case of war]. By paying taxes we are cooperating with evil."

—John Overstreet in personal correspondence with the editor May 7, 2004

No. 3 "The Contradiction of Government Protection"

[T]o argue that a tax-collecting government can legitimately protect its citizens against aggression is to contradict oneself, since such an entity *starts off* the entire process doing the very *opposite* of protecting those under its control. The government, by its very essence, does two things to its citizens incompatible with this claim. First, it *forces* the citizenry to enroll in its "defense" activities, and second it *prohibits* others who wish to offer pro-

tection to clients in "its" geographical area from making such contract with them, ... [The government police, themselves, engage in criminal behavior.] First and most basic is that the revenues raised to pay their very salaries and to purchase their uniforms, vehicles, weapons, etc., are based on *compulsion*. To wit, they engage in the very action *against* which they are sworn to protect their "customers." It is hard to imagine a more blatantly self-contradictory system.

—Walter Block in Hans-Hermann Hoppe (Ed.), THE MYTH OF NATIONAL DEFENSE (Auburn: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2003), pp. 304-305 and 322.

No. 4 "On the Duty to Disobey"

"Why are people under any moral duty to cooperate with such a [libertarian government] legal system? If, e.g., the government prescribes that people pay taxes so that the system can operate, must they obey? Must they refrain from establishing competing legal systems that endeavor to compete with the government?"

"Individuals in their private capacities, it seems clear, stand under no parallel restraints. If someone opens a pizza parlor, in a way that violates no one's rights, you are under no duty to cooperate with him by, say, patronizing his restaurant rather than a competitor's. You are free to try to drive him out of business, if you can do so in a way that respects his rights.

"Why are matters any different for the government? If, as Frederic Bastiat argued in his great pamphlet THE LAW, the state acquires no rights that individuals do not themselves possess, where does the duty to obey the law [to pay taxes to support the legal system] enter the scene? How can there be a duty to obey the state if there is no duty to obey the owner of the corner grocery store?"

—David Gordon, "Liberty and Obedience," Vol. 10 THE MISES REVIEW (No. 3), Fall 2004, pp. 2-3.

No. 5 "The Road to Liberty"

Stop asking the government for "free" goods and services, however desirable and necessary they may seem to be. They are not free. They are simply extracted from the hide of your neighbors - and can be extracted only by force. If you would not confront your neighbor and demand his money at the point of a gun to solve every new problem that may appear in your life, you should not allow the government to do it for you. ... This one insight understood, this one discipline acted upon and taught by millions of Americans to others could do more to further freedom in American life than any other.

—William E. Simon, A TIME FOR TRUTH (1978), p. 237 (italicized in the original). [V]

Justice That Unites: Harivallabh Parikh and the People's Court

By Mark Shepard

The true practice of law is to unite parties riven asunder.

—Gandhi

The girl sat cross-legged on the ground, a long scarf pulled over her head to hide her face. She was sixteen years old, as was the boy sitting beside her.

She wanted a divorce.

After three years of marriage (the girl said), the boy and his father were mistreating her, making her eat outside the house, and roughing her up. She had had enough.

The man hearing her case was short and stocky, with loose tan clothing and a white kerchief over his hair. He sat at a small wooden table with papers spread on it, in the shade of a large tree at one edge of a raised-earth platform. Before him and to the sides of him on the platform, sitting on the ground and facing him, were about 200 *adivasis*—tribal people of an aboriginal race found in many parts of India.

The man gently pointed out to the girl that the boy wanted her to return home to him. "Will you go back and try again if he says he won't act that way anymore?"

The girl held firm.

The man pressed her, still gently: "What are *your* conditions? We can fine him, punish him, anything." But the girl remained unmoved.

Finally the man agreed that the marriage should end.

"Is there a problem in returning a dowry?" he asked. There was no dowry in this case, he was told. "Any children?" No. "Inside?" No.

The girl owned a few things that she had left at the boy's house, and the boy owned a few things the girl had taken away with her. The value was about equal, so the man declared it an even trade.

The man wrote out the decision, and the boy and the girl thumbprinted it. The *adivasi* villagers gave it official approval with a shout of "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai!" ("Victory to Mahatma Gandhi!") Someone started through the crowd, passing out *jaggery*—chunks of unrefined sugar, the traditional *adivasi* token of reconciliation.

With that case concluded, the man turned his attention to the two other cases for the afternoon: a dispute between a father and a husband over who should pay a young woman's medical expenses; and another about a saddle that had been borrowed but not returned.

The man was Harivallabh Parikh, and he was presiding over the People's Court.

* * *

Gandhi had always warned his village workers not to get involved in village disputes. But sometimes circumstances call for some bending of the rules.

That's what happened to Harivallabh Parikh.

Harivallabh had been trained in village development work at Gandhi's own Ashram. Soon after India achieved its independence, Harivallabh decided to find a village to settle in. So he started hiking through a region of eastern Gujarat state populated mostly by *adivasis*.

After passing through about 200 villages, he stopped at one to restock his supplies.

"I came into the village to buy some grain," he told me, "and sat down at a stone-mill to grind it. It's unusual to see a man hand-grinding, so I soon had a large audience to talk to."

The villagers hoped Harivallabh might set up a shop in their village, so they invited him to settle there. Harivallabh accepted and left to fetch his wife and a few belongings.

But while he was gone, local officials and money-lenders learned of his plans. Figuring that this could mean an end to their taking advantage of the uneducated and unorganized *adivasis*, they threatened the villagers, warning them not to accept the newcomers.

When Harivallabh and his wife arrived a few weeks later, they found that most of the villagers wouldn't even talk to them. They were forced to live in the open under a tree. They spent the first few days singing devotional songs, making friends with the children, and talking with a few brave adults.

Though Harivallabh remembered Gandhi's advice, disputes were mostly what he heard about from the few villagers who would speak to him; so he saw no way to avoid getting involved. Quarrels were common in the villages around there and could easily lead to murder, even over minor matters. There was also much mistreatment of wives by their husbands.

"In the old days, village councils used to settle disputes," Harivallabh said. "But the people lost faith in the councils when they became tools of the corrupt government and police. That was why disputes in this area started getting out of hand."

Meanwhile, modern legal institutions didn't do nearly as good a job of maintaining order and harmony in communities.

Gandhi, himself a lawyer, had been a harsh critic of the legal system introduced by the British. "The lawyers have enslaved India," Gandhi wrote. The lawyers preyed on quarrels, making them worse by dragging them out and by trying to get the most for their clients—all the while draining their clients' cash.

Harivallabh convinced some of the villagers to let him try to settle their disputes. Sometimes he marked a spot equal in distance from the disputants' homes, where they could meet without loss of prestige. He was often able to settle the disputes in a way both sides could accept.

It was from these beginnings that the People's Court grew.

Meanwhile, Harivallabh's patience had won out. The villagers had figured out a way to avoid reprisals on any one family by the moneylenders and officials: They lodged the couple for a short time in each of the village cottages.

A little later, the villagers built the couple a canopy to stay under. Several months after that, Harivallabh got a grant of government land nearby. There he built his ashram—Anand Niketan, "Abode of Joy."

Over 30 years later, Harivallabh was overseeing development of 1100 adivasi villages, totaling 1½ million people.

But the heart of the program, he said, was still the People's Court.

* * *

In 1978, when I visited, the People's Court had become the high court of a judiciary system based in the villages.

"Most cases are handled in the new village councils," Harivallabh said. "It's only the cases they find too hard to handle that are sent here." Many of the spectators at the court were village leaders who came to watch each session as a form of training.

In three decades, the People's Court itself had handled over 30,000 cases of all kinds. Most of these were marriage quarrels, with property disputes next in number. But the court also handled criminal cases—assault, theft, even murder.

The People's Court usually met once or twice a month. Between times, complaints were accepted by the secretary of the court, who issued summonses to the people involved.

"Often it's the guilty person who makes the complaint, to keep it out of the government courts," Harivallabh said. Even reluctant villagers usually responded to the court's summonses, since the community expected them to. But not always.

"If someone doesn't turn up in two or three sessions," Harivallabh said, "we send 50 to 100 people to talk to them and persuade them. If that doesn't work, we send 500, or start fasting in front of their house." Eventually the person would come.

When a case came before the court, each side would tell its story, while Harivallabh asked questions. Other witnesses would be called. Then Harivallabh would state how he understood the case, to check that he'd gotten it straight.

If the case was fairly simple, he would then give a judgment. A harder case would be referred to a jury selected from friends of each side. In these cases, Harivallabh would step in only if the jury couldn't reach a decision.

This was the basic order of procedure, but it was followed only loosely. The People's Court was very informal.

The court's judgments, like its summonses, were almost always respected. When they weren't, the vil-

lagers enforced them in the same ways.

But these judgments were seldom a great burden on the guilty. They were aimed mainly at giving fair compensation for wrongs and at making peace between the two sides; often they were only token. This was because the court's power to keep peace was based not on the threat of punishment but on the moral pressure of the community, directed by the court.

"Revenge is not a productive emotion."

— Michael Milken in THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, February 13, 2001, p. A 26.

For the adivasis, the court was a means to quick, efficient justice, without resort to expensive, drawn-out legal proceedings—proceedings that often fueled bitterness and caused great hardship for one or both parties. And because the People's Court was so close at hand, it helped settle conflicts before they got out of control.

"When I arrived, there were two or three murders in this area every week," Harivallabh said. "Now that's down to three or four a year." The rate of marital separations had also gone down.

Finally, the People's Court was a means of social education. Harivallabh used the court to promote high standards of conduct, fair play, justice, and accountability to the community.

As might be expected, the government courts were not always happy about Harivallabh's efforts to take their place—especially in criminal cases. Harivallabh told of a run-in with the government regarding one of the more than 200 murder cases tried by the People's Court.

"A few years back, a villager named Fatu borrowed a pair of chickens from his neighbor Ramji to feed a guest. Later on, Fatu refused to pay back the chickens. There was an argument. Fatu shot Ramji with an arrow and killed him, in front of Ramji's wife."

Fatu rushed to Harivallabh and told him what he had done.

The case was brought before the People's Court. "The judgment was that Fatu would farm Ramji's land for the family, until Ramji's son was old enough to handle it. And that Fatu would eat one meal a week with Ramji's family.

"In the beginning, Fatu resisted going over for his meal, because he was afraid to. When he did start going, the family at first served him his meal outside the door. But, gradually, friendly relations were restored."

Of course, none of this was legal. More trouble came when the police learned of the case and arrested Fatu. "But when they brought him to trial, no one came to testify. The police had to explain to the judge that the case had already been settled by the People's Court."

The judge sent for Harivallabh. Harivallabh reasoned with the judge in private: "Ramji was killed. Now you want to kill Fatu. Who will look after the family?" He convinced the judge that Fatu should be let off. So the judge sent for Fatu and told him that when he returned to the court he should claim the killing was self-defense.

Now, even though adivasi custom accepts killing, lying is considered unpardonable. Fatu told the judge he couldn't do it.

The judge turned to Harivallabh for help.

"I would normally consider myself a devotee of Truth," Harivallabh told me. "But in this case, I urged Fatu to go along with the judge."

Fatu was finally persuaded. But, back in the courtroom, the effort proved too much for him. He blurted out that the killing hadn't been self-defense at all and, what's more, that the judge had told him to lie about it!

The judge declared that Fatu must be a madman. He quickly adjourned the court until the next day, when the court would hear the only eyewitness: Ramji's wife.

The next day Ramji's wife took the stand. She told the court that her husband had been killed by a stranger and that Fatu hadn't even been in the village that day. (Harivallabh had supplied her the story.)

"So, Fatu was acquitted. And, since that time, the government hasn't brought to trial any case settled in the People's Court."

* * *

Though the government began leaving the People's Court alone, the People's Court did not always leave the government alone. Government officials have themselves sometimes had to answer to the court.

One case involved three forest rangers who were collecting taxes from the adivasis. The rangers were demanding twice what was owed and pocketing half. This was reported to the People's Court, which took statements from the villagers and then sent summonses to the rangers. One ranger came to the court and confessed, returning the money and signing a promise not to take extra money again.

The other two rangers didn't come. When the rangers' superiors refused to take action, Harivallabh handed the story to the newspapers and announced that the adivasis would protest in front of government offices. Soon after this announcement, a high official arrived to look into the court's complaint. As a result, one of the rangers returned the money; the other lost his job.

In a much more serious incident, the body of a murdered boy was found in the field of a village near his own. When the police came to investigate, they lined up the village men and made them crouch on all fours for three days straight, letting them rest only at night. Any man who moved was beaten.

Several nights later, three police returned to the village and demanded to see a young girl said to have been in love with the murdered boy. They took the girl some distance away, and all three raped her. They thrust a stick inside her to make her bleed, so there would be no evidence of the rape, then left her bound and gagged. The village women found the girl soon after.

The People's Court was called into special session. When the villagers heard the story, several rose and said they would burn down the police station. The villagers were ready to do it, and Harivallabh himself could hardly contain his anger; but he finally convinced them to take a calmer approach.

Several people were sent to the village to get all the facts in the case. Then Harivallabh and others set the story before a local police official. The official assured them that action would be taken and agreed to meet with the court the next day. But, when he arrived at the court, he brought with him a local businessman and a state legislator, who joined him in asking that the villagers forget the whole affair.

The villagers were not ready to forget it. The story—along with a threat of further action—was sent to the government and to the newspapers, which gave it wide publicity. Following this, the three police who had raped the girl were removed from service.

Still not satisfied, 1,500 of the villagers staged a one-day, 40-mile march to two local government centers. Finally, one of the high-ranking officers involved in the murder investigation was demoted and transferred.

Local businessmen and politicians rushed to the state capital to get the demotion reversed. But the chief minister (equivalent to a state governor) reportedly told them he didn't wish to cut short the life of his administration by letting an adivasi uprising grow to invincible strength.

Harivallabh and the adivasis were demonstrating that almost nothing can stand in the way of a united community. And building unity is what the People's Court is all about. ▢

[Excerpted and adapted from the book *Gandhi Today: A Report on Mahatma Gandhi's Successors*, Simple Productions, Arcata, California, 1987, reprinted by Seven Locks Press, Washington, D.C., 1987.

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"No one has a right to coerce others to act according to his own view of truth."

—Mahatma Gandhi, *THE COLLECTED WORKS*, 1961, 46:216.

On the History of the Word “Voluntaryism”

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was to be placed in the hands of the Anglican church, the established Church of England, and the schools were to be supported largely from funds raised out of local taxation. Nonconformists, mostly Baptists and Congregationalists, were alarmed by the Factories Education Bill of 1843. They had been under the ban of the law for more than a century. At one time or another they were not permitted to be married in their own churches, were compelled to pay church rates against their will, and had to teach their children underground for fear of arrest. They became known as voluntaryists because they consistently rejected all state aid and interference in education, just as they rejected the state in the religious sphere of their lives. Three of the most notable voluntaryists included the young Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), who was to publish his first series of articles “The Proper Sphere of Government,” beginning in 1842; Edward Baines, Jr., (1800-1890) editor and proprietor of the LEEDS MERCURY; and Edward Miall (1809-1881), Congregationalist minister, and founder-editor of THE NONCONFORMIST (1841), who wrote VIEWS OF THE VOLUNTARY PRINCIPLE in 1845.

The educational voluntaryists wanted free trade in education, just as they supported free trade in corn or cotton. Their concern “for liberty can scarcely be exaggerated.” They believed that “government would employ education for its own ends,” (teaching habits of obedience and indoctrination) and that government-controlled schools would ultimately teach children to rely on the state for all things. Baines, for example, noted that “[w]e cannot violate the principles of liberty in regard to education without furnishing at once a precedent and inducement to violate them in regard to other matters.” Baines conceded that the then current system of education (both private and charitable) had deficiencies, but he argued that freedom should not be abridged on that account. Should freedom of the press be compromised because we have bad newspapers? “I maintain that Liberty is the chief cause of excellence; but it would cease to be Liberty if you proscribed everything inferior.”¹⁰ Baines embraced what he called the Voluntary system which included

all that is not Government or compulsory, - all that men do for themselves, their neighbours, or their posterity, of their own free will. It comprehends the efforts of parents, on behalf of the education of their children, - of the private schoolmaster and tutor, for their individual interest, - of religious bodies, benevolent societies, wealthy benefactors, and cooperative associations, in the support of schools, - and of those numerous auxiliaries to education, the authors and editors of educational works, lecturers, art-

ists, and whoever devotes his talents in any way to promote the instruction of the young, without the compulsion of law or the support of the public purse. ...

[I]ts very essence is *liberty*. It offends no man's conscience, exacts from no man's purse, favors no sect or party, neither enforces nor forbids religion in the schools, is open to all improvement, denies to no person the right of teaching, and gives to none the slightest ground for complaint. It is as *just* and *impartial* as it is free. In all these important respects it differs from systems which require the support of law and taxation.¹¹

Although educational voluntaryism failed to stop the movement for compulsory schools in England, voluntaryism as a political creed was revived during the 1880s by another Englishman, Auberon Herbert (1838-1906). Herbert served a two-year term in the House of Commons, but after meeting Herbert Spencer in 1874, decided not to run for re-election. He wrote “State Education: A Help or Hindrance?” in 1880, and began publishing his journal, THE FREE LIFE (Organ of Voluntary Taxation and the Voluntary State) in 1890. Herbert advocated a single monopolistic state for every given geographic territory, but held that it was possible for state revenues to be generated by offering competitive services on the free market. Two of his essays are titled “The Principles of Voluntaryism and Free Life” (1897), and “A Plea for Voluntaryism,” (posthumously, 1908).¹²

Although the label “voluntaryist” practically died out after the death of Auberon Herbert, its use was renewed in late 1982, when George Smith, Wendy McElroy, and Carl Watner began editing THE VOLUNTARYIST. George Smith, after publishing his article “Nineteenth-Century Opponents of State Education,” suggested use of the term to identify those libertarians who believed that political action and political parties were antithetical to their ideas. In NEITHER BULLETS NOR BALLOTS: Essays on Voluntaryism, Watner, Smith, and McElroy explained that voluntaryists were advocates of non-political strategies to achieve a free society. They rejected electoral politics “in theory and practice as incompatible with libertarian goals,” and explained that political methods invariably strengthen the legitimacy of coercive governments. In concluding their “Statement of Purpose” they wrote: “Voluntaryists seek instead to delegitimize the State through education, and we advocate the withdrawal of the cooperation and tacit consent on which state power ultimately depends.”¹³

Although there was never a “voluntaryist” movement in America until the late 20th Century, earlier Americans did agitate for the disestablishment of government-supported churches in several of the original thirteen States.¹⁴ Such people believed that the individual should not automatically become a member of the church simply by reason of being born in a given state. Their objection to taxation in support of the church was two-fold: taxation not only gave the state

some right of control over the church; it also represented a way of coercing the non-member or the unbeliever into supporting the church financially. In New England, where both Massachusetts and Connecticut started out with state churches, many people believed that they needed to pay a tax for the general support of religion - for the same reasons they paid taxes to maintain the roads or the courts. It was simply inconceivable to many of them that society could long exist without state support of religion. Practically no one comprehended the idea that although governmentally-supplied goods and services might be essential to human welfare, it was not necessary that they be provided by the government.

In Connecticut, the well-known Congregational minister, Lyman Beecher, opposed disestablishment of the State church, which was finally brought about in 1818. In his autobiography, Beecher admits that this was a time of great depression and suffering for him. Beecher expected the worst from disestablishment: the floodgates of anarchy would be loosened in Connecticut. "The injury done to the cause of Christ, as we then supposed, was irreparable." This supposition was soon challenged by a new revolutionary idea, that true religion might stand on its own without support from the state. "Our people thought that they should be destroyed" if the law no longer supported the churches. "But the effect, when it did come, was just the reverse of the expectation. We were thrown on God and ourselves," and this made the church stronger. "Before we had been standing on what our Fathers had done, but now we were obliged to develop all our energy." Beecher also noted with elation the new alignment of religious forces which was the result of disestablishment. By repealing the law that compelled everyone to pay for the support of some church, "the occasion of animosity between us and the minor sects was removed, and the infidels could no more make capital with them against us." On the contrary, "they began themselves to feel the dangers from infidelity, and to react against it, and this laid the basis of co-operation and union of spirit." Beecher's final conclusion was "that the tax law had for more than twenty years really worked to weaken us" and strengthen our opponents.¹⁵

There is no way to know what voluntarism might accomplish today or tomorrow, but on both moral, practical, and historical grounds we have every reason to think that our experiences would parallel that of Beecher's. Voluntarism has a rich past and hopefully an even brighter future. ▮

¹Retrieved from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voluntarism>, July 4, 2005.

²Volume 2, THE NEW SHORTER OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1993), p. 3600.

³G.E. Aylmer (editor), THE LEVELLERS IN THE ENGLISH REVOLUTION, Ithaca: Cornell University Press (1975), p. 68.

⁴ibid., p. 80.

⁵ibid., p. 68.

⁶W. B. Selbie, ENGLISH SECTS: A SHORT HISTORY OF NON-CONFORMITY, New York: Henry Holt and Company (n.d.), p. 215.

⁷ibid., p. 217.

⁸"Voluntarism" in Chambers's ENCYCLOPAEDIA (American

Revised Edition), Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co. (1882), Volume X, pp. 23-24 at p. 23.

⁹William Ross, "Voluntarism," in James Hastings (ed.), ENCYCLOPEDIA OF RELIGION AND ETHICS, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons (1970), Volume XII, pp. 634-637 at p. 635.

¹⁰For quotes in this paragraph, see George H. Smith, "Nineteenth-Century Opponents of State Education," in Robert B. Everhart (ed.), THE PUBLIC SCHOOL MONOPOLY, Cambridge: Ballinger Publishing Company (1982), pp. 109-144 at pp. 121, 124, 122, and 123, respectively.

¹¹Edward Baines [Jr.], EDUCATION BEST PROMOTED BY PERFECT FREEDOM NOT BY STATE ENDOWMENTS, London: John Snow, 1854, p. 28.

¹²See Eric Mack, "Auberon Herbert, Voluntarist," THE VOLUNTARYIST, Whole No. 11 (November 1984), pp. 5-8. Also see Auberon Herbert, THE RIGHT AND WRONG OF COMPULSION BY THE STATE AND OTHER ESSAYS, edited and with an Introduction by Eric Mack, Indianapolis: Liberty Classics (1978).

¹³Carl Watner, George H. Smith, and Wendy McElroy, NEITHER BULLETS NOR BALLOTS: ESSAYS ON VOLUNTARISM, Orange: Pine Tree Press (1983).

¹⁴See Carl Watner, "Voluntarism in the Libertarian Tradition," in ibid. for more information on the 19th Century abolitionists and non-resistants.

¹⁵For quotes in this paragraph see Carl Watner, "The Struggle for Religious Freedom and the Voluntarist Tradition," Whole No. 34 (October 1988), pp. 3-5 at p. 3. Henry David Thoreau mentions his contact with the state church in Massachusetts in his essay on "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience." On Thoreau's brush with the state church see Carl Watner, "Highway Tax vs. Poll Tax: Some Thoreau Tax Trivia," THE VOLUNTARYIST, Whole No. 71 (December 1994), p. 1. Also see Carl Watner, "For Conscience's Sake: Voluntarism and Religious Freedom," THE VOLUNTARYIST, Whole No. 55 (April 1992); and James Luther Adams, "The Historical Origins of Voluntarism," THE VOLUNTARYIST, Whole No. 79 (April 1996), p. 6.

Government Protection

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uniforms, vehicles, weapons, etc. are based on *compulsion*. To wit, they engage in the very action against which they are sworn to protect their 'customers.' It is hard to imagine a more blatantly self-contradictory system." [p. 322]

Government and taxation are both species of theft for the simple reason that peaceful people are threatened with imprisonment and/or confiscation of their property if they refuse to support or pay. If this is hard to understand consider the following two points: First, all governments presume "to establish a compulsory monopoly of defense (police, courts, law) service over some given geographical area." Property owners who would prefer to subscribe to another protective agency, or who would prefer to protect themselves, or pacifists who would prefer no protection at all are not allowed to opt out. Secondly, all government services are funded "by the aggression - the robbery - of taxation, a compulsory levy on the inhabitants of the" area. [Murray Rothbard, p. 48 of I MUST SPEAK OUT]

The fact is that the very idea of a coercive agency providing protection is flawed. Not only do the police do a poor job of protecting us, they also fail to live up to the very moral ideals they are supposed to support. On both the practical and the moral level, government protection is a myth. ▮

The Myth of Government Protection

By Carl Watner

"People in the mass," wrote H. L. Mencken, "soon grow used to anything, including" coercive government, he might have added. [A CARNIVAL OF BUNCOMBE (1956), p. 329] The myth of government protection - that "we must have government," and that government's only legitimate purpose is to protect us from the aggression of others - is so old that it is something that most people accept as fatalistically as death, taxes, and the weather.

The writing of this article was suggested by a book published in 1999 by the Jews for the Preservation of Firearms Ownership. It was written by Richard W. Stevens, and titled DIAL 911 ... AND DIE. The main theme of Stevens' book is to debunk "the belief that people don't need guns because the police" are able protect them. [p. 1] Stevens does an excellent job of giving example after example of where government police protection has "bombed." When people "dial 911" either the police fail to respond, or if they do respond, they often arrive too late to help the victim stave off an attack or criminal trespass. Further, Stevens points out that the individual citizen has "no constitutional right to state protection," that the police have no statutory duty to actually provide protection, and that they cannot be sued for their failure to provide protection under the legal doctrine of sovereign immunity. Stevens and others use this as ammunition to attack the advocates of gun control, arguing that if the police won't or can't protect us, then we should be able to protect ourselves by having the unrestricted right to own weapons of self-defense.

This is all well and good, but it misses the main point, which is that we shouldn't have a government (providing protective services) because the very existence of such a coercive institution violates our individual rights. Stevens ignores this entirely. If the police are a failure, he says, buy yourself a gun. No where does he say you ought to have the right to pay a competing protection agency (one you think can do a better job for you) or that you ought to be able to opt out of paying your taxes so you can decide how to use the money to protect yourself. The ideas that protective agencies should not be tax-supported; that customers should contractually pay for the level of service they desire; that competition among protective agencies would enhance the quality and lower the price of the services they provide; and that such companies should be contractually liable for their failure to provide protection are indeed strange notions to any but the most radical libertarians and voluntaryists.

In my article, "Call the COPS - But Not the Police: Voluntaryism and Protective Agencies in Historical Perspective," [THE VOLUNTARYIST, Issue 123] I point out that the common element that unites all historical varieties of police is the fact that they have been agents of the state "endowed with the exclusive monopoly of using force." Their operation violates the normal canons of civilized life, enshrined by the commandment, thou shalt not steal. Just because people need protection, it does not follow that it can only be provided by government-paid police. As Walter Block and Hans-Hermann Hoppe have pointed out in THE MYTH OF NATIONAL DEFENSE, "A tax-funded protection agency is a contradiction in terms." "[T]he revenues raised to pay their very salaries, and to purchase their

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