
The Voluntaryist

Whole Number 185 *"If one takes care of the means, the end will take care of itself."* 2nd Quarter 2020

Voluntaryism in the Libertarian Tradition

By Carl Watner

Voluntaryism figures prominently in the libertarian tradition in three distinct ways. First, voluntaryism represents the final goal of all libertarians. After all, libertarianism is the doctrine that all the affairs of people, both public and private, should be carried out by individuals or their voluntary associations. Secondly, voluntaryism is a realization about the nature of political society. The voluntaryist approach rests on the crucial, theoretical insight that all tyranny and government are grounded on general popular acceptance. The primary responsibility for the existence and continuation of any political system rests on the majority of the population, who willingly acquiesce in their own subjection. Thirdly, voluntaryism represents a way of achieving significant social change without resort to politics or violent revolution. Since voluntaryists realize that government rests on popular consent, they conclude that the only way to abolish government power is simply for the people at large to withdraw that consent. As a means, voluntaryism calls for peaceful persuasion, education, civil disobedience, and non-violent resistance to the State. To libertarians, voluntaryism thus represents a means, an end, and an insight. Only voluntary means can be used to attain the truly voluntary society, based on the insight that existing tyrannies depend on the voluntary submission of the governed. The purpose of this essay is to elucidate the history, the development, and the actual practice of these ideas within the context of the libertarian tradition.

These three aspects of voluntaryism mutually reinforce each other. The very goal of an all-voluntary society suggests its own means. The means are the seeds which bud into flowers and come into fruition. It is impossible to plant the seed of coercion and reap the flower of liberty. Thus politics and government, which libertarians view as essentially coercive processes, can never legitimately be used to attain libertarian goals. The non-voluntaryist always proposes to compel people to do something; usually by passing laws or electing politicians to office. These laws and officials depend upon political action and physical violence. Voluntaryist means, like non-violent resistance, for example, violate no one's rights. They only serve to nullify laws and politicians by ignoring them. Voluntaryism does not require of people that they shall violently overthrow their

government or even use the electoral process to change it; but merely that they shall cease to support their government, whereupon it will fall of its own dead weight.

Etienne de la Boetie (1530-1563), the first libertarian political philosopher in the Western world, was largely responsible for the original statement and elaboration of the voluntaryist principle. In his DISCOURSE ON VOLUNTARY SERVITUDE, probably written during the mid-1550s, la Boetie discussed one of the most critical problems of political philosophy; namely, the question of civil obedience. "Why in the world do people consent to their own enslavement?" he asked. "Why do the bulk of the people acquiesce in their own subjection?" La Boetie answered these questions by explaining the governmental mystique created by rulers and their intellectual apologists. By relying on custom, by providing bread and circuses to the citizenry, and by creating a vast network of governmental supporters dependent on political plunder, governments were able to engineer and sustain their own popular acceptance among the populace.

La Boetie's voluntaryist insight, that consent is brought about largely by government propaganda, speaks sharply to the problem of strategy. It leads directly to the conclusion that mass civil disobedience and mass non-violent resistance are the only true methods for overthrowing tyranny. Realizing the great value of natural liberty, la Boetie called for a thorough process of educating the public to the truth, a process which would give back to the people a knowledge of the blessings of liberty and a knowledge of the myths and illusions fostered by the State. The primary task of opponents of tyranny is an educational one: to alert the public to their despotic condition, to demystify and desanctify the entire State apparatus. La Boetie was thus the first political philosopher to move from an emphasis on the importance of consent to the strategic importance of toppling tyranny by leading the public to withdraw their consent.

The value of la Boetie's insights were somewhat lost to the 16th and 17th Century English, yet voluntaryism played a significant part in the struggle between Church and State during these centuries. During the mid-17th Century, the English Independents were moving towards a completely voluntaryist conception of the Church. They considered that maintenance of churches by tithes and State support ought to be done away with. This was no

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Thirty-Eight Years of THE VOLUNTARYIST

By Carl Watner

[Editor's Note: The following article (with minor changes) was prepared for and appeared in Volume One, Issues 1 - 22 of the Voluntaryist Reprint series, a project spearheaded by Hans Sherrer in 2018.]

THE VOLUNTARYIST first appeared in October 1982. Sixteen years later I elaborated on "Why I Write and Publish THE VOLUNTARYIST," in Issue 93 (August 1998). Today, twenty-two years after that, I am still writing and publishing THE VOLUNTARYIST. My four children have grown into adulthood, completed their homeschooling, and are leading their own successful lives. My wife is still at my side – would that every man could have such a devoted and honorable mate. My two businesses are still in operation, and my wife and I are still living in the same house that we built 30 years ago. The voluntaryist website is actively maintained by its dedicated webmaster, Dave Scotese.

Not much has changed in the small world around me, but the larger world around us has grown more and more statist. The "noose is tightening" as we often observe. All the more reason for gathering together the first 22 issues of THE VOLUNTARYIST in this volume. Even though they have been digitized, there is good reason to preserve them in the old-fashioned way. Our intention is to reprint and publish all 180+ issues of which this is Volume One.

My primary reasons for writing and publishing THE VOLUNTARYIST remain the same. "I Must Speak Out" so as to elaborate the voluntaryist ideal of a non-violent and stateless world. A record must be retained and preserved so that those who follow in our footsteps have a firm foundation upon which to build. The history and philosophy of free men must not be lost.

THE VOLUNTARYIST has not been the project of a single man, although I have been editor and publisher for many years. My thanks goes out to Wendy McElroy, George Smith, Robert Kephart (deceased), Robert LeFevre (deceased), Hans Sherrer, Dave Scotese, Charlie Guitierrez, Chuck Hamilton, Julie Pfeiffer-Watner, Jim Russell, Floy Johnson (deceased), Jeff Knaebel (deceased), Jamie Potter (deceased) and to the numerous

unnamed supporters, subscribers, and helpers who have pitched in along the way.

Here is the 1998 article mentioned above:

Why I Write and Publish THE VOLUNTARYIST

As I compose this article, I have only a few more issues of THE VOLUNTARYIST to write and publish before I reach No. 100. Once completed, that effort will have spanned nearly seventeen years of my life. During that time I have been imprisoned for forty days on a federal civil contempt charge (1982); married Julie (1986); witnessed the homebirths of our four children; operated two businesses here in South Carolina (one of them a feed mill, I have been running since my marriage; the other, a retail tire store and service center I took over in early 1997); have been responsible for the building of our family's house; and participate in the homeschooling of all our children. Although THE VOLUNTARYIST has been an important and constant part of my life all this time, the first article that I wrote and published preceded THE VOLUNTARYIST by nearly a decade. It was "Lysander Spooner: Libertarian Pioneer" and appeared in REASON Magazine in March 1973.

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As I reflect upon my writing career, I recall one of my very first self-published monographs – TOWARDS A THEORY OF PROPRIETARY JUSTICE. In it there was a piece titled "Let It Not Be Said That I Did Not Speak Out!" There is obviously something in my mental-spiritual-physical constitution that needs a publishing outlet. It is important to me to set forth my ideas, especially when they are so very different from the vast majority of people that I associate with most of the time. If everyone seems to be heading toward a precipice, they need to be warned. If I am pushed and shoved along with them, even if I am powerless to stop the crowd, it is important to me and my integrity that some record be left of my resistance and of my recognition that we are headed toward danger. "Let It Not Be Said That I Did Not Speak Out!" was published in 1976, and appears now in the pages of THE VOLUNTARYIST for the first time:

When the individuals living under the jurisdiction of the United States Government awake to political reality, they are going to find themselves living in government bondage. Every act of government brings us closer to this reality. The only logical future is to expect life in a socialized state. Henceforth, to be a citizen will mean to be a slave.

To speak the truth without fear is the only resistance I am bound to display. To disseminate without reserve all the principles with which I am

acquainted and to do so on every occasion with the most persevering constancy, so that my acquiescence to injustice will not be assumed, is my self-assumed obligation.

The honest among us realize that the resort to coercion is a tacit confession of imbecility. If he who employs force against me could mold me to his purposes by argument, no doubt he would.

The alternative is then simply living by the libertarian principle that no person or group of people is entitled to resort to violence or its threat in order to achieve their ends. This means that everyone, regardless of their position in the world, who is desirous of implementing their ideas, must rely solely on voluntary persuasion and not on force or its threat.

Individuals make the world go round; individuals and only individuals exist. No man has any duty towards his fellow men except to refrain from the initiation of violence. Nothing is due a man in strict justice but what is his own. To live honestly is to hurt no one and to give to everyone his due.

... Justice will not come to reign unless those who care for its coming are prepared to insist upon its value and have the courage to speak out against what they know to be wrong.

Let it not be said that I did not speak out against tyranny.

Wishing almost never makes it so. Wishing and working almost always do.
- Anonymous

As much as any other piece I have ever written, it probably best explains why I have devoted so much time to THE VOLUNTARYIST over the years. There is an episode in Ayn Rand's ANTHEM in which the protagonist, Equality 7-2521, discovers a room full of books, someone's personal library, that had escaped the book-burning that undoubtedly had accompanied the creation of the collectivist holocaust in which he lived. It was among those books that he rediscovered the word "I" which had disappeared from the current lexicon. My hope is that THE VOLUNTARYIST message - that a non-violent and stateless society is both moral and practical - will survive, just like the books that Equality found. Hopefully, if someone in the future finds copies of THE VOLUNTARYIST newsletter or the anthology ... [I MUST SPEAK OUT (published 1999)] they will help to re-ignite, re-discover, or elaborate the ideal of a totally free market society. One doesn't need to be a pessimist to see that those ideas might one day disappear. Even in our own time, only a small part of the population embraces libertarian ideas; and only a small number of libertarians would consider themselves voluntaryists - people who reject voting and the legitimacy of the State. Even the individualism of several centuries of American history is in danger of being obliterated by State propaganda. With luck, THE VOLUNTARYIST will play some small part in preserving a record of those times in history when men

were free to act without State interference, and were self-confident enough to know that the State possesses no magical powers.

May knowledge and wisdom come to those who read THE VOLUNTARYIST. Long live voluntaryist ideas. ▣

Voluntaryism in the Libertarian Tradition

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new idea and for a long period there had been Independents who realized that this was the logical outcome of their views of separation of Church and State. For example, a petition circulated in London in 1647, demanded that "tithes and all other enforced maintenance may be forever abolished, and nothing in the place thereof imposed; but that all ministers be paid only by those who voluntarily chose them and contract with them for their labors." By substituting 'taxes' for 'tithes' and 'governmental officials' for 'ministers,' we realize how close these early religious dissenters were to espousing the ideas of a truly voluntary State. The early advocates of Church-State separation were in the vanguard of the libertarian tradition because they took one of the first steps necessary to separate the State from all the rest of society.

In these religious controversies, the term 'voluntaryism' was representative of those who advocated complete separation of Church and State. The term itself came into common usage during the extensive disputes between the Churchmen and dissenters in Scotland during the second decade of the 19th Century. It was then picked up by the English non-conformists during the 1830s, and applied to their agitation to keep the English government out of the educational process. The 'voluntary educationists' saw a religious threat in State-controlled education and many believed that the law of supply and demand, or the voluntary principle, as they termed it, would provide for the education of the whole English people. Auberon Herbert attempted to repopularize the term during the 1880s and the 1890s in his voluntaryist journal, FREE LIFE.

William Godwin, author of an ENQUIRY CONCERNING POLITICAL JUSTICE in 1793, offers a good example of voluntaryist thinking in late 18th Century England. It is interesting to note that revolutionary violence never became a serious threat to England because of the influence of the religious non-conformist teachings among the working classes. Godwin, among other extreme political thinkers of that era, believed that physical force was too uncertain in its results and that peaceful resistance was more desirable and effective. Godwin argued for reasonable discussion and disciplined non-cooperation as the means of fighting against authority. In POLITICAL JUSTICE (Book II, Chap. III, and Book IV, Chap. 1) he urged that "all government is founded in opinion. Men at present live under any particular form, because

they conceive it their interest to do so. ... Destroy this opinion, and the fabric which is built upon it falls to the ground." "Make men wise and by that very operation you make them free. Civil liberty follows as a consequence of this; no usurped power can stand against the artillery of opinion."

Godwin, in one important particular, was at variance with the main tradition of dissent in the 18th Century. A large body of dissenters thought in terms of politics; they tended to see problems as political and to seek political solutions. They favored associations and the normal methods of bringing political pressure to bear; they looked to legislative action for a solution of problems. Godwin, on the other hand, looked only to the reformation of the individual, objected to political parties, and had no faith in political solutions of what were for him simply moral problems. The voluntaryist dissenters believed that moral agitation was always more effective and more proper than political activity.

The 19th Century abolitionists both in England and the United States, struggling to abolish slavery and the slave trade, were faced with similar problems. Was slave-holding to be abolished by moral suasion or political means? Should abolitionists participate in party politics or should they hold aloof from such controversies? Should they create their own third party organizations to propagate the abolition of slavery? The radical abolitionists were on the cutting edge of the libertarian movement because they viewed slavery as the worst form of stealing. Slavery was called 'man-stealing' because it reflected the theft of a person's self-ownership rights. The problems faced by the 19th Century abolitionists, both in terms of goals and strategy, have much to say about the place of voluntarism in the libertarian movement today.

William Lloyd Garrison led one wing of the abolitionist movement, and it is his views which we shall first examine. By the mid 1840s, Garrison and his chief lieutenants, Wendell Phillips and Henry Clarke Wright, had come to the conclusion that all office-holding and voting was wrong and morally reprehensible. These men arrived at their views in two different ways. During the 1830s, Garrison had addressed himself to the issues of perfectionism and non-resistance. He and his fellow non-resistants rejected not only war, but the entire apparatus that sustained government in power. He summarized their position in the 1838 Declaration of Sentiments adopted by the Peace Convention held in Boston that year. Non-resistants renounced all allegiance to human governments and disabled themselves from holding any political office. This carried with it a rejection of voting. "If we cannot occupy a seat in the legislature or on the bench, neither can we elect others to act as our substitutes in any such capacity."

In 1841, Garrison and his followers underwent a

further transformation, which led to a reinforcement of their beliefs against political action. The Liberty Party, which had been purposely formed as an anti-slavery party in 1840, appalled Garrison, both as a matter of theory and tactics. He claimed that an anti-slavery third party would split the movement and dilute anti-slavery principles by dragging them into the political gutter. Nearly at the same time, the Garrisonians came to the realization that the Constitution was actually a pro-slavery document and that disunion should be the rule of the day. They came to see the Constitution as "a covenant with death and an agreement with hell" and therefore advocated personal disaffiliation from the federal government and sectional disunion from the South.

From A New Friend in Oregon

Hi Carl,

Thanks for the note. I found your site via a friend's link on Twitter. He was responding to somebody who kept pestering him and saying, "You MUST vote!!! Otherwise democracy dies in darkness!" or like that. Gads. I am so sick and tired of people saying, "If you don't vote, you're part of the problem!" My one comeback to a friend who kept pestering me about not voting was this: "You're unmarried, right? How about if I give you a list of men you can choose from to marry? Remember, you MUST get married, right? I mean, look at how many cultures have basically required women to marry or else be subject to ostracism. Is that the kind of society you want to live in?"

She just fumed at me, but at least she's stopped bugging me about voting. I always like the episode of "South Park" where the students are forced to choose between voting for a giant douche or a turd sandwich. Besides, the one time I told somebody I voted for a non-major party candidate, I got the old "You do realize you're just throwing your vote away" line.

If people aren't showing up to vote at some election, could it just possibly be that they really really REALLY just don't want ANY of the options being voted on? How about if you leave me alone, I leave you alone, and we go from there? Anyway I liked the article on not-voting, so I started reading some other stuff and found myself going, "Yeah, exactly! Voluntarism is what I've been trying to do all my life (without having the words for it)!"

I'm enjoying just discovering I'm not alone out there, reading the various articles, and giving my brain a real workout. As I read more and learn more, I'm sure I'll come up with a bunch of questions and responses for you. Thanks for sharing!

This outlook on the Constitution was only developed after the Garrisonians had been preaching their non-resistance and no-voting theories for a number of years. Since Garrison took all of these

demands seriously, he came to condemn voting not only for all non-resistants but for all enfranchised citizens. He took the ground that to vote for any public officer, local, state, or federal, would be to endorse someone who would have to take an oath to uphold the United States Constitution which supported slavery. Any act of allegiance to a government whose constitution supported slavery “means either to undertake to execute the law which I think wrong or to appoint another to do so” for me.

The Garrisonian ideas were propagated in many forums. Garrison himself engaged in a debate with James Birney, soon to be head of the Liberty Party, in the late 1830s. In his “Letter on the Political Obligations of Abolitionists,” Garrison maintained that the political reformation which would bring about the abolition of slavery “is to be expected solely by a change in the moral vision of the people; – not by attempting to prove that it is the duty of every abolitionist to be a voter, but that it is the duty of every voter to be an abolitionist.” It was, in his opinion, the general object of the antislavery movement to so “affect public sentiment ...and alter the views and feelings of the people in regard to the crime of slave holding, that all classes of society... may be induced to rally together *en masse* for the entire abolition of slavery.” Garrison’s field was not the field of political action but that of moral suasion. In seeking to reform public sentiment that lay behind laws and constitutions, Garrison was striking at the heart of the problem.

[P]olitical power doesn't just corrupt the morals and judgment of the people who have it, it corrupts those in orbit around them, too.

- Rick Maybury, EARLY WARNING REPORT, January 2017.

Both of Garrison’s chief helpers, Phillips and Wright, independently expressed their anti-political views. Phillips wrote of his “No-Voting Theory” in *THE LIBERATOR* during the 1844 and then further clarified his views in his 1845 pamphlet, “Can Abolitionists Vote or Take Office under the United States Constitution?” Henry Clarke Wright had earlier formulated his views in his 1841 booklet on “Ballot Box and Battle Field.” Wright maintained the non-resistant position, claiming that the ballot box was at most only a make-shift substitute for the violence of bullets on the battle field. According to his lights, no man could honestly accept the office of voter and then vote against the existence of government. “May a man consent to be invested with power to do an evil and swear to do it, even for the purpose of abolishing that evil?” he asked. Wright claimed that a man may never rightfully consent to do what he thinks wrong. He who would do it proves himself dishonest. “He consents to be vested with power to do what he acknowledges to be wrong, and swears to do it, and then gravely

assures us that he never intended to do it. Such a man is unworthy of any trust.” Thus Wright concluded the fact that any man, knowing the nature and duties of a Congressman or President, “will consent to hold these offices, is of itself sufficient evidence that he is not a true and good man.” Wright summarized his argument by stating that he would not vote, even if by his one vote he could free all the slaves.

Wendell Phillips in his consideration of the question if abolitionists can vote or take office under the Constitution came to a very simple conclusion: namely, that they could not. The position of non-voter and conscientious objector to the government was to be jealously guarded. In a land where the ballot is idolized, the non-voter “kindles in every beholder’s bosom something of the warm sympathy which waits on the persecuted, carries with it all the weight of a disinterested testimony to truth and pricks each voter’s conscience with an uneasy doubt, whether after all voting is right. There is constantly a Mordecai in the gate.” Phillips sustained his claim that “it is by no means necessary that every man should actually vote, in order to influence his times,” by citing the historical examples of conscientious objectors who wielded a moral influence widely disproportionate to their numbers.

Other wings of the radical abolitionist movement supported the no-voting stance taken by the Garrisonians. Nathaniel Peabody Rogers, long-time editor of the New Hampshire Anti-Slavery Society journal, *HERALD OF FREEDOM*, noted that men in this country have been brought up to believe that nothing can be accomplished except by political methods. “They cannot understand how any sane mind can discern any other way to any end.” The only object of party politics, for Rogers, was power. “To get it or preserve it is the only possible motive.” Rogers realized that the vote which a man casts is but a very insignificant emblem of his political power. “The influence which goes out from every man, whether for good or evil, can be but very imperfectly measured by the standard of a ballot. What he seems to lose by the withdrawal of his single vote, is gained 100 fold in the increased force which is given to the testimony of the lips and of the life by that disinterested act. ... We only know that we are following the dictates of plain, practical common sense, in refusing to commit what we see to be a crime, in order to extirpate another crime. We will not consent to obtain power by false pretenses, even for the purpose of abolishing slavery.” Rogers realized the futility of gaining power temporarily; for what can be voted up today, may be voted down tomorrow.

Lysander Spooner was another radical abolitionist who totally rejected voting and political party activity. Prior to the Civil War, Spooner had been asked to lend his support to the Liberty Party. He refused in no

uncertain terms in his letter of March 12, 1856:

I feel at liberty – standing outside of the Constitution and knowing that government of some kind will be carried on in the name of the Constitution – to interpret the Constitution, on those points wherein it is right, and then appeal to those, who professed to be governed by it, to act up to their own standard. I do this on the same principle that, standing outside the Mohammedan religion, I should feel at liberty to interpret the Koran, and appeal to believers to act up to their own creed, wherein it was right. It is on this ground that I write about the Constitution, and not because I ever intend to take any part, directly or indirectly, in administering it. I think no robbery is more flagrant or palpable – nor hardly any more unjustifiable – than taxing men for the support of government, without their personal consent. ... Such taxation is not only robbery in itself, but it supplies the means for, and is the legitimate parent of, nearly all the other tyranny, which governments practice. You will see therefore that it is impossible for me to support any government that acts on that principle, or to act with any party that adopts it.

Spooner echoed Henry Clarke Wright's analysis of voting and consent. Wright wrote that "when a man consents to receive and exercise the right of suffrage ... he consents that a majority shall rule and pledges himself to aid in executing the will of the majority. Whether he votes with the majority or not, by consenting to vote at all, he becomes responsible for whatever it does." Spooner wrote, "I would advocate natural law and constitutional law, wherever I could get an audience to listen; because all men in office and out of office are bound by them without regard to minorities or majorities among the people. But I do not rely upon 'political machinery' (although it may or may not do good, according as its objects are, or are not legal and constitutional) – but I do not rely upon it as such – because the principle of it is wrong. For it admits (and this is my objection to it) that even under a constitution, the law depends upon the will of majorities, for the time being, as indicated by the acts of the legislature. It admits the right of majorities – even under a constitution which purports to fix men's rights – to make and unmake laws at pleasure – or at least with very little limitation."

After the Civil War, Spooner wrote in his NO TREASON pamphlets that voting and tax-paying were not legal evidence of assent to the Constitution. Both were done under duress and were, in effect, acts of self-defense. Spooner never maintained that people

should vote or that voting was proper. Rather he argued, that when and if people vote, their actions were not to be interpreted as unquestioning obedience to the Constitution. Spooner eventually concluded that no one should have the right to vote or make laws. "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 masters and owners of those whom they require obedience." In the final analysis, Spooner rejected the Constitution and politics entirely: "This much is certain – the Constitution either authorized such a government as we have had, or has been powerless to prevent it. In either case, it is unfit to exist."

Henry David Thoreau, the famous civil resistant, was most sympathetic to the abolitionist cause. Thoreau was influenced by his friendship with Ralph Waldo Emerson, who in turn was an admirer of William Lloyd Garrison. All three shared in common the idea of individual conscience standing in opposition to the State. The core of Thoreau's argument is that men become machines when they obey orders without thinking or when they give the government authority to speak or act on their behalf. "Must the citizen ... resign his conscience to the legislator?" Thoreau asked. "Why has every man a conscience, then? I think that we should be men first. ... It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. ... Law never made a man a whit more just; and, by means of their respect for it, even the well-disposed are daily made the agents of injustice." Thoreau was speaking out against slavery as well as against the American invasion of Mexico, which took place in 1846.

Children, nearly the whole world over, attend government-run (or regulated) schools that for the most part not only exemplify, but actually teach, socialism and legitimize the institution of government.

- Carl Watner

Thoreau was particularly out-spoken against voting. He saw voting as a sort of gaming. "The character of the voters is not staked. ... Even voting for the right is doing nothing for it. ... A wise man will not leave the right to the mercy of chance, nor wish it to prevail through the power of the majority. There is but little virtue in the action of masses of men." Thoreau recognized the importance of civil disobedience, both as an individual moral statement and tactical position. Referring to his own short imprisonment and his influence, Thoreau wrote: "If any think that their influence would be lost [in prison], and their voices no longer afflict the ear of the State, ... they do not know how much truth is stronger than error, nor how much more eloquently and effectively he can combat injustice who has experienced a little in his own person."

Adopting la Boetie's strategic outlook, he then wrote: "Cast your whole vote, not a strip of paper merely, but your influence. A minority is powerless while it conforms to the majority; it is not even a minority then; but it is irresistible when it clogs by its whole weight. ... If a thousand men were not to pay their tax-bills this year, that would not be as violent and bloody a measure, as it would be to pay them, and enable the State to commit violence and shed innocent blood. This is, in fact, the definition of a peaceable revolution, if any such is possible. If the taxgatherer, or any other public officer, asks me, as one has done, 'But what shall I do?' my answer is, 'If you really wish to do anything, resign your office.' When the subject has refused allegiance, and the officer has resigned his office, then the revolution is accomplished."

Thus concludes our brief survey of voluntaryism in the libertarian tradition. Voluntaryism has a revolutionary potential that has not been adequately recognized. If we wish to remain true to our libertarian heritage, it is clear that voluntaryism as a means, an end, and an insight, deserves our support.

When wealth is subject to devastating taxes and the constant threat of usurpation, the challenge is to keep one's wealth, not to make it productive.

- Rodney Stark, *THE VICTORY OF REASON* (2005), p. 73.

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[This piece first appeared as No. II in *THE VOLUNTARYIST SERIES*, First Printing – May 1982.] 

How I Became a Voluntaryist

(Continued from page 8)


After law school, I joined a law firm that represented many government employees who had been retaliated against for whistleblowing. Those cases opened my eyes to the vindictiveness of a bureaucrat scorned. I was idealistic (and naïve) enough to believe that justice would prevail. Federal judges knocked that idealism out of me. I quickly learned it was a legal system, not a justice system.

9/11 came and went, and my concern about the erosion of constitutional rights deepened. I formally joined the Libertarian Party thinking that would make a difference. It didn't, but it did introduce me to the non-aggression principle, which I'm sure I heard back in my college days but had ignored.

I started my own practice, and began dealing with even more bureaucrats and politicians. My view that the State merely needed the right actors to work properly took a beating. Finally, after working in and around the State for several years and seeing "how the sausage gets made," I could no longer avoid the fact that the State causes much more harm than good. Its purpose is not to solve problems, prevent disputes, or even to protect us, but to perpetuate its existence and increase its power (and thereby the power of those people who form the State).

Election after election changed nothing and only underscored in my mind that electoral politics is a waste of time. There had to be a better way. This started me delving more deeply into libertarian topics, including anarcho-capitalism, and listening to libertarian-oriented radio shows.

While listening to a radio show called "Free Talk Live," I first heard the term "voluntaryism." I started reading about voluntaryism online and that led me to voluntaryist.com. I devoured the contents of the site.

Voluntaryism makes sense to me. The majority voting one way or the other doesn't make a wrong right. Electoral politics is simply dressing up violence in a socially acceptable manner. I'm embarrassed now that it took me so long to discover the beautiful, peaceful doctrine of voluntaryism. Better late than never. 

Violence begets violence.

- 14th Dalai Lama, *ANCIENT WISDOM, MODERN WORLD* (2001), p. 209.

How I Became a Voluntaryist

By an Anonymous Lawyer

I was born in the early 1970s and raised on a farm in the Midwest. In public school I was taught that the State was a necessary part of life without which we would have chaos and be invaded by other countries. I learned that democracy was the ideal form of government and voting was the duty of every good citizen. It took several decades before I recognized the true nature of the State.

The seeds of my doubt about the State were unknowingly planted by my father. He was a Republican, but he had an anti-authority, libertarian streak that he passed on to me. He often said that “you can’t legislate morality,” nor was he particularly fond of law enforcement, or, for that matter, public school officials. He wasn’t a fan of the State, but it was only because he believed that the wrong people were being elected.

During my teen years, I was a political junkie. I watched the news each night and was convinced that the world’s problems could be solved if more Republicans were elected and the U.S. military received more funding. I cringe now to think about it, but I was excited to vote for George H.W. Bush.

College was my ticket off the farm, so I applied and was accepted to a state college. It was there that I

first heard the term libertarian and began identifying politically as a libertarian. A liberal professor caused me to reconsider my belief that U.S. military intervention is the solution to the world’s problems. Although I didn’t join the Libertarian Party in college, I started voting for Libertarian Party candidates. Despite my new-found belief in a smaller State, I barely avoided joining the military when I was caught up in the drumbeat to war before the first Gulf War. I was one signature away from joining the Army and going to Officer Candidate School after college but nagging doubts about whether that’s what I wanted to do with my life and a high school friend who said in passing that I should be a lawyer changed my plans. I backed out of joining the Army and started focusing on admission to law school.

Law school was a different world. Professors and students assumed without debate that the State was necessary in all parts of life to force people to do what was “right.” My professors presented the legal system as a necessary tool of the State in which judges diligently applied case precedent to disputes to arrive at fair, well-reasoned opinions. Most of my classmates were liberal and believed that the State was a benevolent force for good. I learned to keep my libertarian thoughts to myself.

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