

## ARRANGING OUR OWN LIVES

LEO TOLSTOY

(From *The Slavery of Our Times*, 1900, translated by  
Aylmer Maude)

It is said that without Governments we should not have those institutions, enlightening, educational, and public, that are needful for all.

But why should we suppose this? Why think that non-official people could not arrange their life for themselves, as well as Government people can arrange it not for themselves but for others?

We see, on the contrary, that in the most diverse matters people in our times arrange their lives incomparably better than those who govern them arrange things for them. Without the least help from Government, and often in spite of the interference of Government, people organize all sorts of social undertakings – workmen's unions, co-operative societies, railway companies, cartels, and syndicates. If collections for public works are needed, why should we suppose that free people could not, without violence, voluntarily collect the necessary means and carry out anything that is now carried out by means of taxes, if only the undertakings in question are really useful for everybody? Why suppose that there cannot be tribunals without violence? Trial, by people trusted by the disputants, has always existed and will exist, and needs no violence. We are so depraved by long-continued slavery, that we can hardly imagine administration without violence. And yet, again, that is not true: Russian communes migrating to distant regions, where our Government leaves them alone, arrange their own taxation, administration, tribunals, and police, and always prosper until governmental violence interferes with their administration. And in the same way there is no reason to suppose that people could not, by common agreement, decide how the land is to be apportioned for use.

I have known people – Cossacks of the Oural – who have

lived without acknowledging private property in land. And there was such well-being and order in their commune as does not exist in society where landed property is defended by violence. And I know communes that live without acknowledging the right of individuals to private property. Within my recollection the whole Russian peasantry did not accept the idea of landed property. The defence of landed property by governmental violence not merely does not abolish the struggle for landed property, but, on the contrary, intensifies the struggle, and in many cases causes it.

Were it not for the defence of landed property, and its consequent rise in price, people would not be crowded into such narrow spaces, but would scatter over the free land of which there is still so much in the world. But, as it is, a continual struggle goes on for landed property; a struggle with the weapons Government furnished by means of its laws of landed property. And in this struggle it is not those who work on the land, but always those who take part in governmental violence, who have the advantage.

It is the same with reference to things produced by labour. Things really produced by man's own labour, and that he needs, are always protected by custom, by public opinion, by feelings of justice and reciprocity, and they do not need to be protected by violence.

Tens of thousands of acres of forest lands belonging to one proprietor – while thousands of people close by have no fuel – need protection by violence. So, too, do factories and works where several generations of workmen have been defrauded and are still being defrauded. Yet more do hundreds of thousands of bushels of grain, belonging to one owner, who has held them back to sell them at triple price in time of famine. But no man, however depraved – except a rich man or a Government official – would take from a countryman living by his own labour the harvest he has raised, or the cow he has bred, and from which he gets milk for his children, or the ploughs, the scythes, and the spades he has made and uses. If even a man were found who did take from another articles the latter has made and required, such a man would rouse against himself such indignation, from everyone living in similar circumstances, that he would hardly find his

action profitable for himself. A man so immoral as to do it under such circumstances, would be sure to do it under the strictest system of property defence by violence. It is generally said, 'Only attempt to abolish the rights of property in land, and in the produce of labour, and no one will take the trouble to work, lacking assurance that he will be able to retain what he has produced.' We should say just the opposite: the defence by violence of the rights of property immorally obtained, which is now customary, if it has not quite destroyed, has considerably weakened people's natural consciousness of justice in the matter of using articles, i.e. has weakened the natural and innate right of property, without which humanity could not exist, and which has always existed and still exists among all men.

And, therefore, there is no reason to anticipate that people will not be able to arrange their lives without violence.

Of course, it can be said that horses and bulls must be guided by the violence of rational beings – men; but why must men be guided, not by some higher beings, but by people such as themselves? Why ought people to be subject to the violence of just those men who are in power at a given time? What proves that these people are wiser than those on whom they inflict violence?

The fact that they allow themselves to use violence toward human beings, indicates that they are not only not more wise, but less wise than those who submit to them. The examinations in China for the office of Mandarin, do not, we know, ensure that the wisest and best people should be placed in power. And just as little is this ensured by inheritance, or the whole machinery of promotions in rank, or the elections in constitutional countries. On the contrary, power is always seized by those who are less conscientious and less moral.

It is said, 'How can people live without Governments, i.e. without violence?' But it should, on the contrary, be asked, 'How can rational people live, acknowledging the vital bond of their social life to be violence, and not reasonable agreement?'

One of two things: either people are rational beings or they are irrational beings. If they are irrational beings, then they are all irrational, and then everything among them is decided

by violence, and there is no reason why certain people should, and others should not, have a *right* to use violence. And in that case, governmental violence has no justification. But if men are rational beings, then their relations should be based on reason, and not on the violence of those who happen to have seized power. And in that case, again, governmental violence has no justification.

## WHAT IS AUTHORITY?

MICHAEL BAKUNIN

(From *Dieu et l'état*, 1882, translated by Benjamin Tucker as *God and the State*, 1883)

What is authority? Is it the inevitable power of the natural laws which manifest themselves in the necessary concatenation and succession of phenomena in the physical and social worlds? Indeed, against these laws revolt is not only forbidden—it is even impossible. We may misunderstand them or not know them at all, but we cannot disobey them; because they constitute the basis and fundamental conditions of our existence; they envelop us, penetrate us, regulate all our movements, thoughts, and acts; even when we believe that we disobey them, we only show their omnipotence.

Yes, we are absolutely the slaves of these laws. But in such slavery there is no humiliation, or, rather, it is not slavery at all. For slavery supposes an external master, a legislator outside of him whom he commands, while these laws are not outside of us; they are inherent in us; they constitute our being, our whole being, physically, intellectually, and morally: we live, we breathe, we act, we think, we wish only through these laws. Without them we are nothing, *we are not*. Whence, then, could we derive the power and the wish to rebel against them?

In his relation to natural laws but one liberty is possible to man—that of recognizing and applying them on an ever-extending scale of conformity with the object of collective and individual emancipation or humanization which he pursues. These laws, once recognized, exercise an authority which is