

A Commitment to Voluntaryism

Guest post by Dan Dougherty. Originally published in The Voluntaryist, April 1988.

The tactics may vary – they may be violent or nonviolent – but as long as the goal remains the exercise of power over other people, then the politics of confrontation will always sow the seeds of the next rebellion.

You cannot improve the safety in your community through confrontations with police or the city council. What you can do is quietly organize your neighbors in a network of mutual support. You cannot improve educational opportunities for your children by impugning the motives of teachers, conducting a noisy confrontation with the school board, or waging a disciplined sit-in at the governor's office. What you can do is quietly enroll your children in the independent school of your choice or, if necessary, teach them yourself.

And, yes, you cannot stop U.S. intervention in foreign countries by denying Casper Weinberger a podium at Berkeley or confronting Navy locomotives in Concord. What can you do? You follow Thoreau's advice:

If the tax-gatherer, or any other public officer, asks me, as one has done, "But what shall I do?" my answer is, "If you really want to do anything, resign your office." When the subject has refused allegiance, and the officer has resigned his office, then the revolution is accomplished. (On the Duty of Civil Disobedience)

When the agents of coercion – the school teachers, the postal workers, the IRS agents, the soldiers, etc. – have resigned their offices, the revolution will be accomplished.

What I am advocating is a commitment to voluntaryism because only voluntary action, by definition, precludes the wielding of power as a goal. Confrontations – either violent or nonviolent – always produce a win-loss or a loss-loss result. The goal of the hothead is to wield power, his style is noisy and arrogant, his tactic is confrontation, and the products of his revolution are measured in hours and days. In contrast, the voluntaryist has a goal of mutual satisfaction, the style is quiet and respectful, the tactic is voluntary exchange, and the evolutionary gains are measured in decades and centuries. Mutual satisfaction is a win-win result and voluntaryists have no need for victims and martyrs.