

The Search for Peace

Guest post by Lorne Strider. Originally published in The Voluntaryist, January 1987.

If we look about us in the world today, it soon becomes apparent that only governments are capable of the large scale regimentation and taxation necessary to conscript, train, arm, feed and clothe armies. Only governments with powers of coercive taxation can amass tremendous piles of money needed to change automobile assembly lines to tank and gun production. Ordinarily the factory owners would have no financial motive to manufacture tanks, huge guns or aircraft with only one seat and missiles under wing. There is no market for such products except for government militia.

Individuals can't do this. It is beyond their means. Even large corporations would be out of business quickly. Many of the world's largest corporations could barely afford just one fighter jet, and would go broke making payments on a nuclear submarine or an aircraft carrier. If they did buy a few tanks and jet fighters, what would they do with them? Corporate battles are fought and won by selling more goods and services. Tanks and guns have no value in this pursuit. Rather, the tools of corporate marketing are competitive pricing, product show rooms, and customer appeasement.

It's true that some individuals are irrational and aggressive, and can explode with violence. Groups and gangs can organize on a small scale and pummel each other. But this is not war. None of this compares with government financed war.

But government and the military are traditional human institutions; how can they be eliminated? If this is the only way to end war then surely the quest is hopeless.

The elimination of government and the military would be difficult if not impossible. And this could only be accomplished through violent internecine strife, and once again, there would be war. There must be a peaceful way to travel the road to peace.

Hardly anyone is against peace. If all the people who are for peace and against war were to take a personal responsibility for peaceful actions in their lives, it just might be possible to solve this age old problem. In fact, it might be the only way.

Taking personal responsibility for one's own peaceful actions is not as simple as it sounds. There is an old saying that holds that the driver of a getaway car for the bank robbers is as guilty as the robbers who entered the bank, pointed guns and demanded the money. This is a sound principle and should be applied to all aspects of ethical living.

When responsibility is secondarily removed from us we are, nevertheless, still primarily responsible. Recognizing our responsibilities where they are once and twice removed is

usually difficult, but it can and must be done. It is not enough that we as an individual refrain from direct aggression against others. It is also necessary to avoid the most far removed and subtle aggressions as well.

For example, it is probable that Adolf Hitler never once struck a man. Yet early in his career he lead a rabble political group and instigated numerous violent confrontations. When political power was achieved he was even further removed from the consequences of his ever-increasing aggressions. Here was a man who loved animals so much he was a vegetarian and wanted to outlaw hunting. Was this historical tyrant a peaceful man?

The most cleverly hidden forms of aggression involve our attitudes and beliefs about government. It is easy to get caught up in subtle aggressions sanctioned by the state. It is a common belief that when you or I assault others this is criminal behavior, but when men who claim state authority are violent, this is distasteful, but necessary, official action.

I have asked many people to help me solve a riddle. Why is it that certain actions are considered immoral and criminal when you or I commit them, but are not considered wrong when committed by men with government affiliation? I have yet to receive a satisfactory answer to this.

If we are to be consistent with this principle of primary and secondary non-aggression toward others, there should be no exceptions. To petition others to do dirty work for us does not relieve us of liability for the consequences. Anyone who urges government to use force against others for any reason, even “for their own good,” or who support politicians who promise privileges to some at the expense of others, is guilty of aggression. While it may not be wholly fair to accuse people who encourage political strife of war-mongering, there is a clear and direct connection.

Those who petition the planning commission to limit other’s right to use their property, school board members who condemn and confiscate property, those who seek “funding” for their favorite projects, all tax consumers, whether welfare mothers or Chrysler Corporation, and the self-righteous who urge others to imprison those who use certain non-sanctioned recreational and medical drugs, are part of the larger problem of aggression and war.

If aggression must be curtailed, who shall be excepted? And where shall the curtailment begin? War is not the “sweep of history and events.” It is not outside ourselves and unrelated to our personal lives. You and I are where war begins. And you and I can be where war ends.

Careful and honest self-evaluation will reveal that most of us commit many small aggressions daily. Eventually we must realize that every action we take that leads to aggression makes us morally responsible for any violence that ensues.

If we would truly seek the great ideal of peace on earth, we must learn to avoid urging others to act aggressively. If we petition people who claim “state authority” and who welcome our petition, our complicity and responsibility for resultant violence are not diminished.

This approach to peace is the only basis for striking at the fundamental cause of war. To find a non-violent and peaceful world, we must fill our lives with non-violence and peace.