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Retrieved on 1 January 1999 from www.tao.ca
The Raven 28, pp. 370–375

en.anarchistlibraries.net

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My old sociology tutor once remarked that people under 35 are advocates of social change, while people over that age tend to be keen on social control. Certainly there seems to be a general idea around that as the years go by people become more and more conservative in their thinking. Tolstoy is a clear exception to this rule; the older he got, the more radical he became. As a consequence in the last years of his life he consistently expressed a religious form of anarchism.

Tolstoy's politics, which combined Christianity, pacifism and anarchism, has always been a source of disquiet to his many biographers, and to many Marxists too. They laud the power, the realism and the sincerity of his literary imagination, but when they turn to his politics they seem to fall into despair! Lenin thought Tolstoy a genius and one of the greatest writers in history. He praised his passionate critiques of the state and the church, and his unbending opposition to private property. Tolstoy expressed, Lenin wrote, as no other writer did, the deep feelings of protest and anger that the nineteenth century Russian peasants felt towards the Tsarist state. Yet when Lenin came to consider Tolstoy's 'Christian anarchism' he was harshly dismissive. Tolstoy was a 'crackpot', a 'land-

lord obsessed with Christ', someone who failed profoundly to understand what was going on in Russia and who preached non-resistance to evil asceticism and an emotional appeal to the 'spirit' that were in essence reactionary, misguided and utopian.

A recent biographer, coming at Tolstoy from a very different angle expresses a similar disquiet. Clearly acknowledging Tolstoy as one of the great literary figures, and sympathetic to his subject, A.N. Wilson is completely at a loss when he comes to consider Tolstoy's politics. Tolstoy's critique of 'property' Wilson thinks is 'silly' — failing completely to understand that by 'property' Tolstoy meant the capitalist system, and he goes on to suggest that most of Tolstoy's political writings are a 'complete nonsense'. Wilson clearly fails understand Tolstoy's critique of the state when he opinions that Tolstoy has little to offer in our understanding of the First World War Russian communism and Nazism — all of which exemplify the evils of government that Tolstoy in fact wrote about.

Like Gandhi, who was his equally famous disciple, Tolstoy came to his anarchism by way of a mid-life crisis. For when he was around 50 Tolstoy began to seriously question the meaning of his life. The outcome was a series of books in which Tolstoy began to formulate his anarchist ideas, drawing on some of his earlier experiences — the trauma he experienced in Paris in 1857 when he witnessed with repulsion a public execution, his meeting and discussions with Proudhon in 1861, and the realisation he gained from a serious study of the Bible that the basic teachings of Jesus were absolutely opposed to violence of any kind. The books were *My Confession* (1881), *What I Believe* (1884) and *What Then Must We Do?* (1886). In 1894 Tolstoy published his major work on Christian anarchism *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* and for the rest of his life continued to write letters, essays and tracts on anarchism. But it is worth noting that because of the association of anarchism with violence and bomb-throwing Tolstoy never in fact came to describe himself

One might have serious misgivings about the 'individualism' of Tolstoy's religious anarchism, and about his misogyny — which comes through forcibly in the final chapter of the book where he writes of the law of a woman's nature is to bear lots of children. One might also chaff at Tolstoy's preaching stance, and the moralising tone of much of his political writing. But the central message that comes through his book *What Then Must We Do?* is an important one, and it is one that still has contemporary relevance. For his passionate pleas to renounce violence, in his sustained critique of the state and contemporary capitalism, in his emphasis on the importance of agricultural labour — and the need to earn one's bread by the sweat of one's own brow — and in his suggestions that we critically examine much of what goes under the name of 'science', Tolstoy, as Ronald Sampson has long reminded us, offers us a way forward. He suggests a variant of the only rational solution to the poverty, the hunger, the political repression and the ecological degradation that constitutes the present 'world order', namely anarchism.

Tolstoy may have been a crusty, guilt-ridden, sexist and somewhat cranky old soul, but in the present state of manifest crisis — if you look beyond your own backyard — there really is no alternative to the kind of anarchism he espoused and tried to articulate. As Sampson says 'We simply cannot afford to go on ignoring Tolstoy's message'.

to humans, Tolstoy suggests, as food and drink, and has always been a part of human existence, helping us to understand the world in which we live. But science nowadays no longer serves the general welfare: it has become, like the religions of old, a 'superstition'. The 'business' of science, Tolstoy writes, is now to conceal existing reality: its aim

> … is to maintain superstition and deception among the people and thus hinder the progress of humanity towards truth and welfare (page 100).

Henry George's project of land nationalisation, whereby all would come under the jurisdiction of the state and people would pay a ground rent rather than taxes — an idea that still has currency among some green economists — Tolstoy argues is no solution at all. It still involves slavery and state violence. Thus Tolstoy came to conclude that:

> the slavery of our time was produced by the violence of militarism, by the appropriation of the land and by the exaction of money (property) (page 109).

Addressing members of his own aristocratic class — and himself — Tolstoy suggests that if we really are concerned about the sufferings and the poverty of others, the answer is simple: we should get off their backs, stop exploiting the working people. If I pity a tired horse on which I am riding, he writes, the first thing I must do if I am really sorry for it is to get off and walk on my own feet.

This is what he tried to do in his own life. He gave up his inheritance and class privileges, refused to participate in any governmental activities and attempted to live and work as a simple peasant. For this he has been derided and ridiculed, especially by his academic biographers.

as an anarchist. In recent years several anthologies of these writings have been published, the most useful being the collection *Government is Violence* essays on anarchism and pacifism, edited by David Stephens (1991).

In the bookshops now is a paperback edition of *What Then Must We Do?*, re-issued as a 'Green Classic' by the publishers of Resurgence. It has a short introduction by Ronald Sampson, mainly devoted to contrasting Tolstoy's anarchism with Marx's revolutionary socialism — Marx, along with his ardent followers Lenin and Trotsky, being an advocate of the Jacobin theory of revolution. This theory Tolstoy himself, long before the Russian revolution, had suggested would inevitably lead to another form of oppression, based as it was on the mistaken belief in the value of revolutionary violence.

This old book of Tolstoy is still of interest, even though it has a date quality about it. It is part autobiography, part social critique, part political tract, and it is specifically addressed not to a general reader (you!) but to 'our caste' — the Russian landed aristocracy of the late nineteenth century to which Tolstoy belonged. To understand, and to get the most out of the book, this historical context and this focus has to be kept in mind.

The first part of the book describes Tolstoy's experiences in Moscow around 1880. Apart from his earlier war experiences in the Crimea and a brief visit to Europe some twenty years before, Tolstoy had spent most of his life on his country estate Yasnaya Polyana, situated about a hundred miles from Moscow. There he lived a life of leisure and wrote his famous novels, surrounded by a large family and servants. His experiences when he went to live in Moscow were, in contrast, profoundly disturbing to him. For there he found people living in great poverty in the overcrowded tenements, people who were sick, hungry and destitute. Prostitution and drunkenness were rife. It all came as a deep shock to Tolstoy: it all seemed strange and foreign to him. What did all this mean, he asked himself. Brought up in a culture which suggested that there was noth-

ing intrinsically wrong with riches and luxury, which were God's gifts, Tolstoy initially felt that one could eliminate suffering simply by philanthropy. He tried 'doing good' by charitable activities. Such charity however was resented and seemed to come to nothing, and was simply a form of self-deception. So he began a search for the causes of the poverty and the human degradation that he had observed, and to try and rid himself of the 'delusions' under which he had been living. And Tolstoy came to the simple conclusion as to why people are cold and angry and destitute: namely, that it is due to exploitation. He writes:

> I see that by violence, extortion and various devices in which I participate the worker's bare necessities are taken from them, while the non-workers (of whom I am one) consume in superfluity the fruits of the labour of those who toil (page 61).

Making some telling criticisms of classical economic theory, Tolstoy argues that the power of some people over others does not arise simply from money but from the fact that the labourer does not receive the full value of his or her labour. The separation of the factors of production — land, capital (tools) and labour — which the economist takes as a basic law of production is in fact historically derived, and is a form of enslavement. To be deprived of land and the tools of production, Tolstoy writes, is enslavement. Economic science largely serves to justify this system. It is thus a pseudo-science, devising excuses for violence.

Attempting to look at the issue from a historical and world perspective, and examining specifically American imperialism in Fiji Tolstoy comes to suggest that basically three forms of enslavement have historically arisen. Although they form a historical sequence they are, he feels, all evident under existing capitalism.

The first mode of enslavement was that evident under the system of slavery found throughout the ancient world. This was simply based on personal violence, the enslaving of humans by the sword. Such violence was so intrinsic to the economic structure of the ancients that even the greatest intellect of the age, Plato and Aristotle, failed to notice it. They simply took it for granted. This mode of enslavement has never been abandoned and continues to be embodied in contemporary state structures — with its legal system, prisons, military conscription and work discipline. It is naive to think, Tolstoy maintains, that personal violence went out with the abolition slavery.

The second form of slavery, begun in Egypt and reaching its apotheosis in the feudal system, involved depriving people of land and coercing the workers to pay tribute, either in labour or in crops. This Tolstoy describes as a 'territorial' method of enslavement.

The third and final form of enslavement is based on a monetary system, and this has involved the intensification of government power. This system of slavery — which Kropotkin described as 'wage-slavery' — is impersonal, and is based on the property system which Tolstoy sees as the root of all contemporary problems, or 'evils' as he calls them. And property is simply 'a means of appropriating other men's work' (page 217) .

It may be possible he writes, under slavery or feudalism to compel a person to do what he or she considers bad, but it is not possible to make them think that while suffering violence they are free or what they are compelled to do is for their own welfare. This, however is precisely what is happening under the present property system, Tolstoy argues that the primary function of science is to hoodwink people, to make them feel they are free when they are not, that the state exists for the good of the people when in reality it is a form of violence that upholds 'monetary' exploitation. Science, like art, is as necessary