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Social Pacifists



Sustainable Solutions
to Social Challenges

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future generations. What message does it send when we regularly resort to the use of force to resolve issues that could be reconciled in a more peaceful manner? What does accepting government-backed threats as viable solutions to our social problems say to a child? How can we realistically expect youth violence to decrease while we continue to engage in such a practice?

There is not currently any scientific evidence to support the claim that there is a link between our society's increase in the use of legislative force, and its increase in youth violence. Still, the statistics do show a correlation. Though there is likely not a child anywhere who has perceived this practice as such, the fact remains that such ideas do seep into our cultural consciousness in ways that none of us perceive. Using force as a first-resort solution to our problems is not a message that liberals should aspire to send to future generations.

Force is not a sustainable solution to social problems. People are much more likely to work to solve these problems when they are educated about the severity and importance of the issues, and not simply forced to correct them. People are more passionate about problems that they intimately understand. **Education, and not legislation**, is the liberal solution to all of our social ills. It's true that both methods will work, but which do you think will cause more tension? More hatred? More division?

Which can we sustain?

Once we educate and make people aware of the problems our society faces, we will find that there's more than enough compassion and support for the causes in need. If this isn't true, then it's not likely that any amount of force will ever be enough to solve the problems we face.

Social Pacifists are a small but growing group of people who adhere to a classically liberal system of beliefs and values. However, the Social Pacifists deny the use of force as an acceptable option for achieving their goals.

While at first glance this definition may seem to describe the vast majority of people with liberal beliefs, this is certainly not the case.

Very few people truly think about the actions that mainstream liberals use to reach the objectives that we share. Consider the following:

Mainstream liberals have come to rely increasingly on the use of government-backed force to achieve their goals. However, this same government continues to fail us miserably in its attempts to solve the social problems that most of us consider our top priorities.

Quite some time ago, we used our energies to create a welfare system to act as a safety net for those in need. We asked the government to run that system. Today, welfare system employees receive as much of the money spent on welfare as do the poverty-stricken that the system was created to assist. The people we've put in charge of that system sit in the halls of congress, far removed from the real symptoms of poverty.

We used our energies to help establish a group committed to protecting the health and safety of this country's citizens. We allowed the government to

run that group as well. Today, the FDA talks about the safety of certain chemicals in terms of “x number of *acceptable* deaths per thousand [people exposed].” The organization is notorious for raising the number of “acceptable” deaths from exposure to certain chemicals each year, due to the pressures and monetary persuasions of the companies responsible for producing them. The FDA fails us consistently by allowing such pressures to interfere with the decisions it’s asked to make on our behalf.

We used our energies to form an organization to protect the environment – the EPA. We created this organization as a government agency. Today, the government itself is cited as the single-worst polluter in the United States. David Armstrong of *The Boston Globe* writes:

The United States government, which acts as steward and protector of the nation’s environment, is itself the worst polluter in the land.

Federal agencies have contaminated more than 60,000 sites across the country and the cost of cleaning up the worst sites is officially expected to approach \$300 billion, nearly five times the price of similar destruction caused by private companies. . . .

Nearly every military base and nuclear arms facility in the country is contaminated. The pollution extends from the US Mint, which released hazardous chemicals into the air when producing commemorative coins, to the national parks, where leaky oil tanks and raw sewage are polluting pristine rivers.

Even the Environmental Protection Agency [EPA], charged with enforcing the country’s environmental laws, has been fined for violating toxic waste laws at its laboratories. At the EPA’s lab in Lexington, for example, mercury was discovered leaching into the ground water three years ago. [“The Nation’s Dirty Big Secret,” *The Boston Globe*, November 14, 1999]

M.O: Mainstream Liberal or Religious Conservative?

One of the most disconcerting parts of this allegedly liberal effort to use legislative force to bring certain behaviors into existence, is the striking resemblance it bears to the behavior of some religious conservative groups. The attempts of the Christian Coalition to forcibly ban, censor, and stifle lifestyle choices that are not their own, are no different than the attempts of some self-proclaimed liberal thinkers who pursue the same course, in the name of causes with which we are more compassionate and familiar. Their attempts to forcibly ban abortion on the grounds that they find it to be immoral are no different than the attempts of some liberals to forcibly ban sexual discrimination on the grounds that we find it to be immoral. The conservative attempts to use government power to force the teaching of “creationism” in the science classroom are no different than some allegedly “liberal” attempts to force people to give money to the poor. Regardless of whether or not we believe one cause is more just than the other, the fact remains that both actions are the same. To think otherwise is hypocritical.

Social Pacifists believe that no group should use legislation to force its beliefs onto any other group. Pro-Life’s should spread their message to others by peaceful means. They should present others with their side of the argument in an attempt to prevent abortion. Liberal-minded people should do the same in the name of our chosen causes. We should take as our duty the task of educating the public about the injustices of discrimination in an attempt to rid our society of its practice. Using force to promote our views is wrong, no matter how noble the intention.

Perpetuating Youth Violence

Yet another problem with turning to legislative force to solve social problems is the affect that doing so may have on

the other. Unfortunately, such practices have had two major side-effects since their adoption:

- They have lead to an apparent increase of racism in the workplace, due to their exclusionary nature.
- They have served to reinforce the discriminatory idea that minority groups need special treatment in order to compete with their non-minority co-workers.

However, this argument does have some merit. It assumes that as different groups learn more about each other, understanding will evolve. This is true. As people learn more about one another – become educated about one another – the ignorance and intolerance will disappear. Education is the only answer to the problem of discrimination. Forced integration is one method for facilitating this, but its side effects perpetuate the very attitudes it attempts to eliminate.

Unfortunately, politicians prefer to push for these legislated “solutions” to the problem. By creating a short-term fix to the symptoms of discrimination, they are able to claim victory against the monster - but only in the statistics. Their solutions are far from sustainable. They only serve to feed the creature, hiding away - growing stronger in its government-issue lair.

The end of racism begins with education. Future generations will certainly pay the price if we don't work to find ways of encouraging this learning process without using force.

“Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend.”

- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The EPA is full of shit...

...or “biosolids,” rather.

On July 13th, 2000, USA Today printed a story that should come as no surprise to anyone who is familiar with the EPA's history of environmental “protection.” The article outlined the EPA's policy of allowing *partially* treated human waste to be used as fertilizer on farms across the country. Despite the fact that investigations (including those conducted by Cornell University) report that this practice can be harmful to the public, the EPA continues to claim that it is safe to use this “sludge” to fertilize food crops, even if it has not been treated to a level that would kill all the pathogens contained within.

An audit conducted by the inspector general concluded that “the EPA cannot assure the public that current land application practices are protective of human health and the environment,” [USA Today, *EPA sites safety, but sludge has been blamed for puzzling deaths*, 7-13-2000]. Still, the EPA continues to promote the use of partially treated human waste as a safe and effective fertilizer.

Why is it that an organization created to protect the health of the environment and those who live within it would allow such a practice to continue, despite building evidence to support the danger of doing so?

Disposing of human waste is an expensive process, and one that places a huge burden on the nations 16,000+ municipal sewage plants. Local governments are under ever growing pressure to find ways to dispose of their residents' waste in a manner that will not place additional strain on their local budgets. Demands for more and more government run

services force local governments to search for ways to cut every possible corner, in order to avoid a deficit. The cost of *completely* treating human waste, thus making it safe for use as a fertilizer, is substantially higher than the “partial treatment” allowed by the EPA.

Local politicians win favor with their constituents by claiming that they are “recycling” the waste, rather than disposing of it in a landfill. Local governments save money by avoiding more expensive methods of disposal. As long as the EPA stands firm in its position that partially treated waste is safe for use as fertilizer, it’s a win/win situation for everybody – except, of course, the people who work and live around the farms that receive the fertilizer “free of charge” from the municipalities that produce it.

It is in these areas, far from the larger cities that produce the vast majority of this waste, that the use of partially treated biosolids has been blamed for a growing number of cases of sickness and death. This study does not even touch on the issues that arise when we consider the possible dangers associated with consuming foods grown in a substance that the EPA acknowledges may contain E. coli and other equally dangerous pathogens.

How can we really expect an organization whose funding is controlled by politicians – politicians who are subject to the pressures of competing interests, and who are easily purchased for the price of a campaign – to act in a way that is solely in the best interest of the people? When we give these responsibilities over to the government, and therefore put them in the hands of politicians, the decisions they make become political.

Objectives such as these are best addressed by groups that organize the people, and take matters into their own hands. As an alternative to government-run “efforts” to correct these

The federal government’s “affirmative action” movement began with an executive order from President Johnson in 1965. In the 35 years since its inception, affirmative action programs have been primarily counterproductive in their attempts to end discrimination in our society.

In order to solve racial and sexual discrimination, we have to work to eliminate the sources of these problems – racism and sexism. Discrimination is merely one of the symptoms. Trying to solve these problems with “Affirmative Action” is like trying to treat pneumonia with Jagermeister. Sure, it may temporarily soothe some of the symptoms, but the disease persists – and, in this case, grows.

Since 1965, most of the attempts to put an end to discrimination have come in the form of efforts to force people to treat members of discriminated-against groups fairly. While this may temporarily level the proverbial “playing field”, it certainly doesn’t do anything to remove the emblem of hate from the proverbial fifty yard-line.

One of the most vocalized sentiments of racism today stems from these very attempts to eliminate it. It is far from uncommon to hear white laborers complain about the alleged quotas, which, if only in their minds, kept them from employment or promotion. Statements like, “I would have had no problem getting that job if I were black...” are quite common and far from hidden. This should be seen as evidence that forced attempts to end racism are serving instead to perpetuate it.

You can’t force someone not to hate. The only way to truly end discrimination is to end the ignorance that causes it. It has been argued that by forcing employers to hire an integrated workforce, you will force different groups together in the workplace, and allow each a better understanding of

enforcing them through education (publicity) and threat of economic sanction.

Decades ago, this sort of solution would have not been possible. The communication necessary to keep an ever-growing public informed about the actions of ever growing corporate entities was simply not available.

Today, the Internet makes it possible to organize consumer boycotts on a large enough scale to affect even the largest corporations. Consider the effectiveness of the rtMark (www.rtmark.com) boycott of E-Toys. Consumers worldwide organized via the Internet, boycotted, and spoke out, causing e-toys stock loose over 66% of it's original value, and forcing the toy-retail giant to behave in a manner that they deemed reasonable.

Discrimination:

Discrimination is a problem that has plagued minority groups for generations. The role of government in perpetuating this discrimination is obvious to anyone who knows her history. As the website for the “iFeminist” movement explains:

Governments have been the greatest violators of women's rights for centuries. In the 18th and 19th centuries in America, government denied to women the most basic rights of controlling their own bodies (e.g. birth control) and their own property (e.g. wives did not have an uncontested claim to their own wages). By the late 20th century, government cemented gender hostility into society by assuming a paternalistic role that advantaged women at the expense of men (e.g. affirmative action). Whether through privilege or oppression, governments seem unwilling to respect the full and equal rights of women. [<http://www.ifeminists.com/introduction/faq.html>]

problems, groups all across the country (and across the world, for that matter) have started to take the power away from government, and put it back in the hands of the people.

As an answer to the EPA's impotent efforts to protect our environment and the animals that live in it, groups like the Nature Conservancy have grown to prove what can be done when legislative bureaucracy is not involved. (Perhaps “impotent” isn't an appropriate word to describe the efforts of the EPA. After all, the one thing they have managed to do to the environment does in itself imply virility.)

The Nature Conservancy has taken as its mission the goal of preserving endangered areas and species by saving the lands and waters they need to survive. Through purchases of land and agreements with landowners, the group has come to protect more than 11 million acres of habitat in the United States, and nearly 60 million acres elsewhere in the world. The organization currently manages 1,340 preserves, without the mandate or the money of any government agency. Their lack of government ties and their commitment to working with local people allows the group the freedom to operate across the borders of state and nation without resistance. Their one million members support the efforts of the group because they understand the importance of protecting endangered lands and species — not because they were forced by law to do so.

Because groups such as this are not run by a government bureaucracy, they are not only more effective, but they are also unconditionally in line with the will of the people, and immune to the potential influence of corporate interests.

The Nature Conservancy's success is due in part to its efforts to educate the public about the problems they are trying to solve. In doing so, they come to create much more

dedicated supporters than groups that try and force their will upon the people through legislative action. People who fully understand a problem are much more likely to help solve it. People who are given no choice in the matter are much less likely to feel passionate about the causes they are forced to support.

How is legislation considered “force”???

This is the question that’s most commonly asked of social pacifists; it’s also the one that’s simplest for us to answer.

When we use legislation, we force everyone to act as we say. All you have to do is consider the consequences faced by a person who chooses not to behave as legislated, and you will realize why legislation is force. Regardless of whether or not we agree with the intention, as liberal-thinkers we must agree that threatening people to act in a certain way by consequence of force is wrong.

Why is it then that more and more “liberals” are turning to the use of government-backed force to address social concerns? First of all, most people who are in favor of using force to solve the problems that concern us don’t think about what they are doing as such. Some people may assume that since legislation must be passed by a majority, that such use of force is sanctioned by the majority, and is therefore “acceptable”. Others may just not think about the consequences of legislation.

Secondly, using government force to solve social problems is a quick and easy solution that **is** effective — at least in the short-term. However, though forcing people to act as we see fit is all but immediately and wholly effective, it is by no means a sustainable solution. Forcing people to submit to our set of values - no matter how “just” we perceive our

This situation clearly illustrates the absurdity of putting the responsibility of environmental protection in the hands of government powers. If the environmental standards had been imposed by a group of citizens, enforced via threat of product boycott, this situation could never have occurred. It’s much harder to buy off the public than it is to buy off our elected officials.

If the public had organized and publicized a boycott of Florida Rock, as well as any contractors using Florida Rock products, as well as any business who hired any contractor who used Florida rock products, they could have set their own environmental standards.

While this solution may at first sound far too difficult to implement, consider the following:

It would not be necessary to actually track and boycott every contractor or business that used products from Florida Rock. The very threat of such a boycott would be effective enough to scare away business, and put a dent in Florida Rock’s bottom line. What contractor would take the chance of being boycotted? What business would chance hiring such a contractor, and put itself at risk of receiving bad publicity or being boycotted? It wouldn’t even matter if an actual boycott were ever organized. The very threat of such an action would be enough to make any business cautious enough to insist on using non-Florida Rock products.

By educating the public – by keeping people aware of the business practices of problem businesses – we can keep the actions of these businesses in line with what the public deems reasonable. Legislation is largely ineffective in dealing with large corporations. Instead of relying on the corporate-skewed government agencies for protection from polluters, we should consider setting our own regulations,

Nothing takes the steam out of a quarterly earnings report faster than bad publicity. By educating the public through publicizing the misbehaviors of your chosen corporate bully, you can quickly draw the attention of consumers to such actions.

To take another example from Florida:

In late 1996, Florida Rock Industries began its efforts to build a cement plant in Alachua county. The company petitioned the county government, and received an exemption from the environmental standards for certain types of air pollution. This decision was made at a commission meeting held while a substantial portion of the community's residents - college students at the state university in Gainesville - were out of town for Winter break.

The commissioners tried to defend their decision on the grounds that the plant would bring "much needed industry" to the area, and would create (40) jobs for local residents.

After a strong public outcry over the decision, the commissioners decided to reverse their position, and revoke the permit they had granted to allow the \$100 million plant - which was designed to burn old tires as a source of fuel - to be built. By this time, the company had already started construction of the plant, and sued the county. The courts decided in favor of Florida Rock, and construction of the plant continued.

Though the debate has raged on for the better part of two years - with doctors sighting concerns for the increased levels of airborne particulate matter, toxic heavy metals, and dioxins which are produced when rubber tires are burned for fuel, as well as residents of North Gainesville voicing their complaints about the fine dust which settles on their cars overnight - no further action has been taken by the government to correct the problem.

values to be - won't work forever. Hatred will grow quickly for the principles that we are trying to advance. Anti-progressive revolutions will occur.

Most people have become so used to solving problems in this way, that they fail to realize that there is another, more fair, more progressive, more sustainable option. Consider the solutions offered to the following social problems:

Poverty:

The problems of poverty can certainly be curtailed without the use of government force. The most common reason that members of the right-wing give for opposing the welfare system is that there are people who are abusing the system, and using it as a "free ride." Now it's certainly true that there are people who are abusing the system, but it's also true that the majority of people who use the system are truly in need of assistance. If welfare were a system organized by people local to the symptoms of poverty, and not separated away in an office somewhere far away from the problem, then there would be less chance for "abuse" of the system. The people who do manage to con the huge, impersonal government welfare system would have a much harder time fooling a local welfare group made up of people who live in their community. The argument given above by the right-wing against support for a program for those in need would disappear. We would then find among the current dissenters, supporters for the new non-government welfare system.

This would provide a start. Eliminating the methods of force currently used to fund a system that a great number of people oppose would, in and of itself, eliminate much that stands in the way of a real solution to the problem of poverty. However, this does not go far enough.

The only truly sustainable solution to this problem is to work to create a society of people who work together to help

each other because they understand the necessity of doing so – and not because they have been forced to do so. Educating and exposing the public to the realities of poverty is the way to accomplish this goal. In education and exposure will come support for this cause, and along with it, the contributions of recourses necessary to help end this social ill. Though forcing people to give support to the poor may be a substantially easier and faster solution, it is not one that is sustainable.

With this type of solution, there would be no political bodies regulating where and why and how and how much support could be given, as is so commonly, and so rarely recognized the case today.

In the small college town of Gainesville, FL, a local chapter of Food Not Bombs valiantly took on the mission of feeding the communities hungry by collecting and distributing the countless pounds of perfectly good, fresh, unused food from local restaurants – food that would otherwise have been thrown away at the end of each night. Many restaurants took to the plan with enthusiasm, but the program was quickly stopped due to a local ordinance prohibiting the group’s activities.

Even though the restaurants (one of which I worked in) took every precaution to make sure that the donated food was safe to eat, and that only fresh product was donated, the government in its actions still said that it was better for the hungry to remain that way, than to accept the help of a group whose actions it could not regulate.

In the same town, a local shelter run on public donations of time and money (The St. Francis house) was prohibited from feeding or housing more than thirty people each night, despite the facilities capacity to feed and shelter a substantially larger number of the community’s hungry and homeless. The government deemed that it was safer for these

people to sleep in the street or in the woods nearby, than to fill the beds the shelter provided.

Why is it that the government would work to prevent the people from taking care of their underprivileged? Perhaps regulations are so strict because politicians cannot take credit for the successful work that the public does on its own. Perhaps it’s because it isn’t profitable for government agencies to actually solve any of the problems that they were established to solve. Consider the efforts of the DEA, for example, in the ever-continuing (and ever-more absurd) war on drugs. Wouldn’t “winning” that war essentially put the DEA out of business? When people who are affected and motivated by these problems – people who are immune to the conflicting interests that put pressure on political agencies – organize, work together, and persuade (not force) others to work with them, these problems will at last face the possibility of a solution.

Corporate Disobedience

There are many situations in which education is not only a more fair, but also a more powerful tool than legislative force. The futility of trying to fight the evils of corporate power via legislation is enough to make even the most level-headed person head to the nearest hardware store and start stockpiling fertilizer. Trying to persuade politicians to take legislative action against wealthy and powerful corporate interests generally proves to be a wasted effort. However, while blowing up your local Wal-Mart may prove entertaining, there is another (more pacifistic) way of taming any corporate beast.

One very simple, yet very useful point that people tend to forget is that, no matter how big a business grows, it can’t make money without consumers. It’s important for us to keep this in mind when thinking about solutions to the anti-social tendencies of corporate power.