

Patriotism and Government

by Leo Tolstoy

1

I have several times had occasion to express the idea that patriotism is in our time an unnatural, irrational, and harmful sentiment, which causes the greater part of those calamities from which humanity suffers, and that, therefore, this sentiment ought not to be cultivated, as it now is, but, on the contrary, ought to be repressed and destroyed with all means that sensible people can command. But, strange to say, in spite of the evident and incontestable relationship between universal armaments and destructive wars, which ruin the nations, all my arguments as to the obsolescence, untimeliness, and harm of patriotism have been met either with silence or with intentional misunderstanding. Or, they have been met with the same strange retort: "What is said is that there is harm in the bad patriotism, jingoism, and chauvinism, but the real, good patriotism is a very elevated, moral sentiment, which it is not only senseless, but even criminal to condemn." But as to what this real, good patriotism consists in, either nothing is said, or, instead of an explanation, they utter pompous, highfalutin phrases, or something which has nothing in common with patriotism is put in the place of this patriotism, which we all know and from which we suffer so cruelly.

They generally say that the true, good patriotism consists in wishing real good for one's nation or state, a good that does not impair that of the other nations.

The other day, while speaking with an Englishman about the present war, I told him that the real cause was not any selfish aims, as is generally assumed, but patriotism, as was evident from the mood of all English society. The Englishman did not agree with me, and said that if that was true, it was due to the fact that the patriotism which was now animating the English was a false patriotism, but that the good patriotism, with which he was permeated, consisted in the principle that the English, his fellow citizens, should not act badly.

"Do you wish that only the English should not act badly?" I asked.

"I wish this to all!" he answered, showing plainly by this answer that the properties of benefits – be they moral, scientific, or even applied and practical – are by their nature such that they extend over all men, and so the desire for such benefits for anyone is not only not patriotism, but even excludes it.

Similarly, the peculiarities of every nation, which some other defenders of patriotism intentionally substitute for this concept, are not patriotism. They say that the peculiarities of each nation constitute an indispensable condition for the progress of humanity, and so patriotism, which strives after the retention of these peculiarities, is a good and useful sentiment. But is it not obvious that, if at some time the peculiarities of each nation – its customs, beliefs, and language – formed an indispensable condition of the life of humanity, these same peculiarities serve in our time as the chief impediment to the realization of the ideal of the brotherly union of the nations, which is already understood by men? And so, the maintenance and preservation of the peculiarities of any nationality – Russian, German, French, or Anglo-Saxon – provoking a similar maintenance and preservation not only on the part of the Hungarian, Polish, and Irish

nationalities, but also on the part of the Basque, Provençal, Mordvinian, Chuvash, and a host of other nationalities, does not make for the closer friendship and union of men, but for their ever greater estrangement and division.

Thus the real patriotism, and not the imaginary one, is a desire that this nation or state enjoy the greatest welfare and greatness, which can be obtained and always are obtained only at the expense of the welfare and greatness of other nations and states. It is the patriotism that we all know, the majority of the men of our time are under its influence, and humanity suffers cruelly because of it. It is not a desire for spiritual benefits for one's nation (it is impossible to wish for spiritual benefits for only one's own nation), or the peculiarities of national individualities (that is a quality, and by no means a sentiment), but a very definite feeling of preferring one's own nation or state to all the other nations and states.

It would seem to be obvious that patriotism as a sentiment is bad and harmful. As a doctrine it is stupid, since it is clear that if every nation and state shall consider itself the best of nations and states, then all of them will find themselves in a gross and harmful error.

2

One would think that the harmfulness and irrationality of patriotism ought to be obvious to men. But, strange to say, enlightened, learned men not only fail to see this, but also with the greatest persistency and fervor, though without any rational foundations, refute every indication of the harmfulness and irrationality of patriotism, and continue to laud its beneficence and exalted condition.

What does that mean?

Only one explanation of this remarkable phenomenon presents itself to me. The whole history of humanity, from the most remote times to the present, may be viewed as the motion of the consciousness of separate individuals and of homogeneous aggregates of them from lower to higher ideas.

The whole path traversed both by each individual person and the homogeneous groups of men may be considered as a consecutive series of steps, from the lowest, which is on a level with the animal life, to the highest, which at a given historical moment may be reached by the consciousness of man.

Every man, like the separate homogeneous groups – the nations, the states – has always walked, as it were, over the steps of ideas. Some parts of humanity march on, others fall far behind, and others again, the majority, move in the middle. But all of them, no matter on what step they may be standing, having behind them the obsolete recollections of the past, and ahead of them the ideals of the future, are always in a process of struggling between the obsolete ideas of the past and the ideas of the future, which are just entering into life. What generally takes place is that when an idea, which in the past was useful and even indispensable, becomes superfluous, this idea, after a more or less prolonged struggle, gives way to a new idea, which heretofore was an ideal, but now becomes the idea of the present.

But it also happens that the obsolete idea, which in the consciousness of men has already given way to the higher idea, is such that the maintenance of this obsolete idea is advantageous for people who have the greatest influence in society. And then it happens that this obsolete idea, in spite of its sharp contradiction to the whole structure of life, which is changed in the other relations, continues to influence men and to guide them in their acts. Such a retardation of an obsolete idea has always taken place in the sphere of religion. The reason is that the priests,

whose advantageous position is connected with the obsolete religious idea, making use of their power, intentionally retain the obsolete idea in the minds of men.

The same takes place, and for the same reason, in the political sphere, in relation to the idea of patriotism, on which every state structure is based. Men who profit by it artificially maintain this idea, which no longer has any sense or use. They are able to do so, since they are in possession of the most powerful means for influencing men.

In this do I find an explanation of the strange contradiction between the obsolete idea of patriotism and the whole contrary train of ideas, which in our time have already passed into the consciousness of the Christian world.

3

Patriotism, as a sentiment of exclusive love for one's nation and as a doctrine about the virtuous sacrifice of one's peace, property, and even life for the defense of the weak against the murderousness and violence of their enemies, was the highest idea of a time when every nation considered it possible and just, for the sake of its own good and greatness, to subject the men of another nation to murder and pillage. But as far back as two thousand years ago, the highest representatives of the wisdom of humanity began to recognize the higher idea of the brotherhood of men, and this idea, entering the consciousness more and more, has in our time received the most varied realization. Thanks to the greater ease of communication and the unification of industry, commerce, the arts, and the sciences, the men of our time are so united among themselves that the danger of conquests, slaughter, and violence on the part of neighboring nations has entirely disappeared. All the nations (the nations, not the governments) live among themselves in peaceful, mutually advantageous, amicable, industrial, commercial, mental relations, which they have no reason and no need to violate. And so it would seem that the obsolete feeling of patriotism ought to be destroyed more and more and to vanish completely, as superfluous and incompatible with the vitalized consciousness of the brotherhood of the men of the various nationalities. However, the reverse takes place. This harmful and obsolete sentiment not only continues to exist, but is even fanned more and more.

The nations, without any rational foundation and contrary to their consciousness and their advantages, not only sympathize with the governments in their attacks upon other nations, in their seizures of the possessions of others, and in the use of violence in defending what has already been seized, but themselves demand these attacks, seizures, and defenses, and rejoice in them and are proud of them. The minor oppressed nationalities, which have fallen into the power of the larger states (the Poles, the Irish, the Bohemians, the Finns, the Armenians), reacting against the patriotism of the conquerors, which is crushing them, have to such an extent become infected by the oppressing nations with the obsolete, useless, senseless, and harmful sentiment of patriotism that their whole activity is centered upon it. They themselves, suffering from the patriotism of the powerful nations, are prepared out of the same patriotism to do to the other nations the same that the nations that have conquered them have been doing to them.

This is due to the fact that the ruling classes (meaning by this not merely the governments with their officials, but also all the classes which enjoy an exclusive, advantageous position – the capitalists, journalists, the majority of artists and scholars) are able to retain their exclusive and advantageous position, as compared with the popular masses, only thanks to the political structure which is supported by means of patriotism. By having in their hands all the most powerful means of influencing the masses, they always unswervingly maintain the patriotic

feelings in themselves and in others, the more so, since these sentiments, which support the power of the state, are more than any other rewarded by that power.

Every official succeeds in his service in proportion to his patriotism; even so a military man can advance in his career only in a war, which is provoked by patriotism. Patriotism and its consequences, the wars, give a good income to the newspapermen and advantages to the majority of merchants. Every author, teacher, and professor will make his position more secure the more he preaches patriotism. Every emperor and king gains glory in proportion to his devotion to patriotism.

The army, the money, the school, the religion, and the press are in the hands of the ruling classes. In the schools they fan patriotism in the children by means of history, by describing their nation as the best of all the nations and always in the right. In the adults, the same sentiment is roused by means of spectacles, celebrations, monuments, and a patriotic, lying press. But patriotism is chiefly roused in them by committing all kinds of unjust acts and cruelties against other nations and provoking hatred in these nations for their own nation, and then using this hatred for provoking such a hatred in their own nation.

The fanning of this terrible sentiment of patriotism has proceeded in the European nations in a rapidly increasing progression, and in our time has reached a stage beyond which it cannot go.

4

Within the memory of all, not merely old men of our time, there took place an event that, in the most obvious manner, showed the striking stupefaction to which the men of the Christian world were brought by means of patriotism.

The German ruling classes fanned the patriotism of their popular masses to such an extent that, in the second half of the century, a law was proposed to the people that all men without exception were to become soldiers. All sons, husbands, and fathers were to study murder and to become submissive slaves of the highest rank, and to be prepared for the murder of those whom they would be ordered to kill – the men of the oppressed nationalities and their own laborers who should defend their rights – including their fathers and brothers. The most impudent of all rulers, William II, publicly announced this.

Such a terrible measure, which in the rudest way offends all the best sentiments of men, was, under the influence of patriotism, accepted without a murmur by the nation of Germany.

The consequence of this was the victory over the French. This victory still more fanned the patriotism of Germany, and later of France, Russia, and other powers. All the people of the continental powers submitted without a murmur to the introduction of universal military service, that is, to slavery, which for the degree of degradation and loss of will cannot be compared with any of the ancient conditions of slavery. After that, the slavish submission of the masses in the name of patriotism, and the impudence, cruelty, and madness of the governments knew no bounds. There began a mad race, provoked partly by lust, partly by vanity, and partly by greed for the seizure of foreign lands in Asia, Africa, and America, and a greater and ever greater mistrust and fury of the governments against one another.

The destruction of nations on seized lands was taken as something self-evident. The only question was who was going to be the first to seize the land and to destroy its inhabitants. All the rulers have not only violated the most primitive demands of justice against the vanquished nations and against one another in the most obvious manner, but have also practiced all kinds of deceptions, rascalities, bribes, forgeries, espionage, pillage, and murder. The nations have not

only failed to sympathize with all that, but have even rejoiced, because their states, and not foreign states, have been committing these evil deeds. The mutual enmity of the nations and states has of late reached such wonderful dimensions that, although there is no reason why one state should attack other states, all know that all the states are standing opposite one another all the time extending their claws showing their teeth, and just waiting for someone to fall into misfortune and grow feeble, in order to be able with the least danger to attack him and tear him to pieces.

All the nations of the so-called Christian world have been brought by patriotism to such a degree of bestialization that not only the men who are put to the necessity of killing or being killed wish for and rejoice at murder, but also the men who calmly live in their houses in Europe, who are not threatened by any one, thanks to the rapid and easy means of communication and to the press – all men in Europe and in America – during any war are in the position of spectators in a Roman circus, and just like them rejoice at the slaughter, and just as bloodthirstily cry, “*Pollice verso!*”¹

Not only the adults, but also the children, the pure, wise children, according to the nationality to which they belong, rejoice when they hear that not seven hundred, but one thousand Englishmen or Boers were killed and torn to pieces by high explosive shells. And the parents, I know such, encourage their children in such bestiality.

But more than that, every increase of the army of one state (and every state, being on account of patriotism in danger, wishes to increase it) compels the neighboring state to also increase its army for the sake of patriotism, which again calls forth a new increase of the first. The same is true of the fortresses and fleets. One state builds ten ironclads, so the neighboring ones build eleven. Then the first builds twelve, and so on in an endless progression.

“I’ll pinch you.” “And I’ll strike you with my fist.” “I’ll whip you.” “And I’ll club you.” “I’ll shoot you.” Bad children, drunken men, and animals quarrel and fight in this manner, and yet this same thing is taking place in the midst of the highest representatives of the most enlightened states, the same ones who are guiding the education and morality of their subjects.

5

The state of affairs is getting worse and worse, and there is no possibility whatever of arresting this degeneration, which is leading to certain ruin. The only way out from this situation, as credulous people thought, is now closed by the events of recent times. I am speaking of the Hague conference, and the war between England and the Transvaal, which followed immediately thereafter.

If people who think little or only superficially were able to console themselves with the idea that international tribunals can remove the calamities of war and ever growing armaments, the Hague conference, with the war which followed upon its heels, showed in the most obvious manner the impossibility of solving the question in this manner. After the Hague conference it became obvious that so long as there shall exist governments with armies, the cessation of armaments and wars is impossible. For an agreement to be possible, it is necessary for the persons agreeing to believe one another. But for the powers to believe one another, they must lay down their arms, as do bearers of truce, when they come together for a consultation.

¹ Transcriber’s note – The phrase means “with a turned thumb,” and is used in the context of gladiatorial combat. It refers to the hand gesture used by Ancient Roman crowds to pass judgment on a defeated gladiator.

But so long as the governments do not believe one another, do not destroy or diminish their armaments, keep increasing their armies in conformity with the increase among their neighbors, and use spies to unswervingly watch every movement of neighboring armies, knowing that every power will attack the neighboring one as soon as it shall have a chance to do so, no agreement is possible, and every conference is either a piece of stupidity, a plaything, a deception, a piece of impudence, or all these things taken together.

It behooved the Russian government, more than any other, to become the *enfant terrible* of this conference. The Russian government is so spoiled by the fact that no one replies at home to all those obviously lying manifestoes and decrees. Having without the least scruples ruined its own nation by means of armaments, having choked Poland, robbed Turkestan and China, and strangled Finland with particular fury, it proposed to the governments to disarm themselves, with the full conviction that it would be believed.

But, no matter how strange, how unexpected, and how indecent this proposition was, especially at a time when orders had been given to increase the armies, the words, enunciated in the hearing of all, were such that the governments of the other powers could not decline to participate in the comical and patently deceptive consultations. The delegates came together, knowing in advance that nothing could come of it, and in the course of several months, during which they received good salaries, though they laughed in their sleeves, all of them good-naturedly pretended that they were busy establishing peace among the nations.

The Hague conference, which ended in terrible bloodshed – the Transvaal war, which no one has tried to stop – was nonetheless useful, though in a different way from what was expected from it. It was useful in that it showed in the most obvious manner that the evil from which the nations suffer cannot be mended by the governments, and that the governments, even if they wished to do so, are unable to abolish either armaments or wars. In order to be able to exist, the governments must defend their nations against attacks from other nations. No nation wants to attack another, or ever does attack another, and so the governments not only do not wish for peace, but also even make efforts to rouse the hatred of the other nations toward their own. Having roused the hatred of the other nations toward their own, and patriotism in their own nations, the governments assure their people that they are in danger and must defend themselves.

Having the power in their hands, the governments are able to irritate the other nations and to evoke patriotism in their own, and they use every effort to do both. They themselves cannot help doing so, because upon this is their existence based.

If the governments were needed before to defend their people against attacks from other nations, now, on the contrary, the governments artificially violate the peace that exists among the nations, and provoke hostilities among them.

When it was necessary to plow, in order to be able to sow, plowing was a sensible thing. But it is evident that it is senseless and harmful to plow after the crops have grown up. And yet it is precisely this that the governments make their nations do – destroy that union which exists and would not be impaired by anything, if there were no governments.

6

Indeed, what are those governments, without which it seems impossible for men to be able to exist in our time? If there was a time when the governments were a necessary and lesser evil than the one which resulted from defenselessness in relation to organized neighbors, the

governments have now become an unnecessary and much greater evil than all that with which they frighten their nations.

Governments, not only the military ones, but governments in general could be, I do not say useful, but harmless, only in case they consisted of infallible, holy people, as is assumed to be the case in China. But governments, by dint of their very activity, which consists in the practice of violence, are always composed of elements which are the very opposite of holy – of the most impudent, coarse, and corrupted men. For this reason every government, and especially every government to which the military power is delegated, is a most dangerous institution in the world.

The government, in its broadest sense, with the inclusion of capitalists and the press, is nothing but an organization such that the great majority of men are in the power of the minority, which stands above them. This minority submits itself to the power of a still more restricted minority, and this again to a still more restricted minority, and so forth, reaching at last one man or a few men, who by means of military violence gain the power over all the rest. Thus this whole structure is like a cone, all the parts of which are in the full power of the few persons, or the person, at the apex of the cone. But the apex of this cone is seized by those men, or by that man, who is more cunning, bolder, and more unscrupulous than the rest, or an accidental heir of those who were bolder and more unscrupulous.

Today it is Borís Godunóv, tomorrow – Grigóri Otrépev; today – the harlot Catherine, who with her paramours strangled her husband, tomorrow – Pugachév, the day after – mad Paul, Nicholas, and Alexander III. Today – Napoleon, tomorrow—Bourbon, Orleans, Boulanger, or a company of Panamaists; today – Gladstone, tomorrow – Salisbury, Chamberlain, and Rhodes.

And it is such governments that are invested with full power, not only over property and life, but also over the spiritual and moral development, the education, and the religious guidance of all men.

Men produce this terrible machine of power, letting anyone who pleases seize this power (and all the chances are that it will be seized by the one who is morally worst), slavishly submit to it, and marvel that they are faring badly. They are afraid of mines and of anarchists, but are not afraid of that terrible structure which threatens them any minute with the greatest calamities.

Men found that, to defend themselves against enemies, it is useful for them to tie themselves together, as the Circassians do, when defending themselves. But there is no danger, and men still continue to tie themselves. They carefully tie themselves in such a way that one man is enabled to do with them what he pleases. Then they allow the end of the rope that binds them to dangle about, leaving it to the first rascal or fool to take it up and do with them what he wants.

Is it not precisely what the nations are doing, when they submit, establish, and support a government that is organized with military power?

7

To free people from those terrible calamities of armaments and wars, which they suffer now, and which keep growing greater and greater, we do not need congresses, conferences, treaties, or tribunals, but the abolition of that implement of violence that is called government, and from which originates all the greatest calamities of men.

To abolish the governments only one thing is needed. It is necessary that men should understand that the sentiment of patriotism, which alone maintains this implement of violence, is a coarse, harmful, disgraceful, bad, and above all, immoral sentiment. It is coarse, because it is

characteristic of only such men as stand on the lowest stage of morality and who expect from other nations the same acts of violence that they want to practice themselves. It is harmful, because it violates the advantageous and joyous peaceful relations with other nations, and, above all, produces that organization of the governments, in which the worst man can acquire and always acquires the power. It is disgraceful, because it transforms the man not only into a slave, but also into a fighting cock, a bull, and a gladiator, who ruins his forces and his life, not for his own purposes, but for those of his government. It is immoral because, instead of recognizing himself as the son of God, as Christianity teaches us, or at least as a free man, who is guided by his reason, every man, under the influence of patriotism, recognizes himself as the son of his country and the slave of his government, and commits acts which are contrary to his reason and to his conscience.

Men need but understand this, and the terrible bondage of men, called the government, will fall apart of its own accord, without any struggle, and with it will fall that terrible, useless evil which is caused by it to the nations.

Men are beginning to see this. This is, for example, what a citizen of the United States writes:

The one thing which we all, farmers, mechanics, merchants, manufacturers, and teachers ask is the right to attend to our own business. We have our homes, love our friends, are devoted to our families, and do not interfere in the affairs of our neighbors. We have our work, and w» want to work.

Leave us alone!

But the politicians will not leave us alone. They impose taxes upon us, eat up our sustenance, keep a census of us, and call our youths to their wars.

Whole myriads of those who live at the expense of the government are maintained by them in order to impose taxes upon us. But to tax us successfully, permanent armies are maintained. The argument that the army is needed for the defense of the country is an obvious deception. The French government frightens the people by saying that the Germans are about to attack them. The Russians are afraid of the English. The English are afraid of everybody else. And now we in America are told that it is necessary to increase the fleet and to add to the army, because Europe may at any moment unite against us. That is a deception and a lie. The common people in France, in Germany, in England, and in America are against war. All we wish is to be left alone. The men who have wives, parents, children, and homes have no desire to go away to fight with anybody. We are peaceable and fear war. We hate it.

All we want is not to do to others what we do not want others to do to us.

War is a direct consequence of the existence of armed men. A country that maintains a large permanent army will fight sooner or later. A man who is proud of his strength in a wrestling match will someday meet a man who considers himself a champion wrestler, and they will fight. Germany and France are only waiting for a chance to try their strength. They have fought several times and will fight again. Not that the masses wish for war, but that the upper classes fan in them their mutual hatred and compel people to think that they must fight in order to defend themselves.

Men who would like to follow Christ's teaching are taxed, insulted, deceived, and drawn into the army. Christ taught meekness, humility, forgiveness of sins, and that it is bad to kill. Scripture teaches people not to swear, but the upper classes compel us to swear on the Scripture, in which they do not believe.

How can we be freed from these spendthrifts, who do not work, but who are dressed in fine cloth with brass buttons and costly ornaments; who are supported by our labors, for whom we till the soil?

Shall we fight with them?

But we do not recognize bloodshed, and, besides, they have the arms and the money, and they can stand it longer than we.

But who composes the army that will fight us?

This army is formed by us, our deceived neighbors and brothers, who have been made to believe that they are serving God when they defend their country from the enemy. In reality, our country has no enemies except the upper classes, who have taken upon themselves to guard our interests, if only we shall consent to pay the taxes. They consume our sustenance and rouse our true brothers against us, in order to enslave and degrade us.

You cannot send a telegram to your wife, your friend, or your commission dealer unless you first pay a fee, which is being collected for the maintenance of armed men, who may be used for the purpose of killing you, and who will unquestionably put you in jail if you do not pay it.

The only means of stopping this consists in impressing people with the idea that it is bad to kill, in teaching them that the whole law and the prophets demand that we should not do to others what we do not wish that others should do to us. Silently disregard these upper classes, and refuse to bow before their martial idol. Stop supporting preachers who preach war and put forward patriotism as something important.

Let them go and work, as we do.

We believe in Christ, but they do not. Christ said what he thought. They say what they think will please the men in power – “the upper class.”

We will not enter military service. We will not shoot at their command. We will not arm ourselves with bayonets against the good and meek masses. We will not at the suggestion of Cecil Rhodes shoot at shepherds and agriculturists, who are defending their hearths.

Your deceptive cry, “Wolf, wolf!” does not frighten us. We pay our taxes only because we are compelled to do so. We will pay them only so long as we are compelled to do so. We will not pay any church tribute to the hypocrites, or our tithes for your hypocritical philanthropy, and we will on every occasion express our opinion,

We will educate the men.

And all the time our silent influence will grow. Even the soldiers who have been drafted into the army will waver before fighting. We will preach the idea that the Christian life in peace and good will is better than a life of struggle, bloodshed, and war.

Peace on earth will come only when men shall separate themselves from the armies and will wish to do to others what they wish that others should do to them.

Thus writes a citizen of the United States of North America, and on all sides and in all forms similar voices are heard.

Here is what a German soldier writes:

I have taken part in two expeditions of the Prussian Guard (1866,1870), and I hate war from the depth of my heart, since it has made me inexpressibly unhappy. We, the wounded warriors, receive for the most part such miserable rewards that we really have to be ashamed of having ever been patriots. I, for example, receive daily eighty pfennigs for my disabled arm, which was shot through at the storming of Saint Privas, on August 18, 1870. Many a hunting dog needs more for its maintenance. I have suffered for years from my disabled right arm. As early as 1866 I took part in the war against the Austrians, fighting at Trautenau and König-grätz, and I have seen a lot of horrors. In 1870 I, being in the reserve, was again called out, and, as I have already said, I was wounded at the storming of Saint Privas. My right arm was twice shot down its whole length. I lost a good position (I was then a beer brewer), and after that I could not get it back. Since then I have never been able to get on my legs again. The intoxication has passed away, and the invalid warrior has nothing to live on but a beggar's pittance and alms...

In a world in which men run about like trained animals and are not capable of any other idea than that of outwitting one another for the sake of mammon, I may be considered an odd person. I nonetheless feel in myself the divine idea of peace, which is so beautifully expressed in the Sermon on the Mount. According to my innermost conviction, war is nothing but commerce on a large scale – a commerce of the ambitious and mighty in the happiness of the nations.

What horrors one passes through in connection with it! I shall never forget them, those pitiful groans, which penetrate me to the marrow of my bones. Men who have never done any evil to one another slay one another like wild animals, and petty souls of slaves draw the good God into it as an accomplice in these acts.

My neighbor in the ranks had his jaws shattered by a bullet. The unfortunate man was insane from pain. He ran about like a madman, and in the burning summer heat was unable to find some water with which to cool his terrible wound. Our commander, Crown Prince Frederick (later the noble Emperor Frederick) wrote in his diary at that time, "War is an irony on the Gospel."

Men are beginning to understand the deception of patriotism, in which all the governments are trying so zealously to maintain them.

8

"But what will happen when there shall be no more governments?" people generally ask.

There will be nothing. What will happen will be this: that which long ago ceased to be useful and now is superfluous and bad will be destroyed. What will be destroyed is the organ that, having become useless, has grown to be harmful.

“But if there shall be no governments, people will violate and kill one another,” people generally say.

Why? Why will the abolition of an organization, which arose as the result of violence and which has been transmitted from generation to generation for the purpose of exerting violence – why will the abolition of such an obsolete organization cause people to violate and kill one another? It would seem, on the contrary, that the destruction of the organ of violence would have the effect that people would stop practicing violence and killing one another.

There are now people who are specially educated and prepared for killing and violating men, people to whom the right to commit acts of violence is delegated, and who make use of an organization that is established for the purpose. Such violence and murder is considered to be a good and virtuous act. When government is abolished, people will not be educated for the purpose of violence, no one will have the right to do violence to others, there will be no organization of violence, and, as is not the case with the men of our time, violence and murder will always and by all men be considered to be a bad thing.

If, after the destruction of the governments, acts of violence shall be committed, it is evident that they will be less than those at the present time, when there exist organizations specially established for the production of violence, and when there are conditions when violence and murder are considered good and useful. The abolition of the governments will only destroy the traditional, useless organization of violence and its justification.

“There will be no laws, no property, no courts, no police, no popular education,” people generally say, intentionally confusing the violence wielded by governmental power with the different activities of society.

The abolition of the organization of governments, which are established for the purpose of exerting violence against people, does not bring with it the destruction of what is rational and good, what is non-violating in the laws, the courts, property, police defense, financial institutions, and popular education. On the contrary, the absence of the rude power of the governments, whose only purpose is to support themselves, will contribute to a more rational and just public organization, which is in no need of violence. Courts, public affairs, and popular education will continue to exist to the extent to which the nations shall need them, and in a form which will not contain any evil that is connected with the present governmental organization. Only that will be destroyed which was bad and which interfered with the free manifestation of the will of the nations.

But even if we admit that, with the absence of the governments, there will occur disturbances and inner conflicts, the state of affairs would even in that case be better than what it is now. The present condition of the nations is such that it is hard to imagine it worse. The masses are all ruined, and the ruin must inevitably keep growing greater. All the men are turned into military slaves, and most await the command at any moment to go out and kill and be killed. For what else shall they wait? That the ruined nations shall starve to death? That, indeed, is now taking place in Russia, Italy, and India. Or that not only the men, but also the women shall be drafted into the army? In the Transvaal they are beginning to do so.

Thus, even if the absence of government should actually mean anarchy in the negative, disorderly sense of the word (which it does not at all mean), no disorders of anarchy could be worse than the condition to which the governments have already brought their nations and toward which they are leading them.

And so the liberation from patriotism and the destruction of the despotism of the governments, which is based upon it, cannot help but be useful to people.

Examine yourselves, people, for the sake of your bodily and spiritual good, and for the same good of your brothers and sisters. Stop, think, and reflect on what you are doing!

Examine yourselves and understand that the Boers, English, French, Germans, Bohemians, Finns, and Russians are not your enemies. The only enemies are you yourselves, who with your patriotism support the governments, which oppress you and cause your misfortunes.

They undertook to defend you against dangers, and have carried this condition of defense to such an extent that you have all become soldiers and slaves, that you are all ruined, that you are being ruined more and more, and that you may and must expect at any moment the breaking of the strained string and the terrible slaughter of you and your children.

No matter how great the slaughter may be and how it may end, the condition will remain the same. Even so and with still greater tension will the governments arm and destroy and corrupt you and your children, and no one will help you to stop it all, if you are not going to help yourselves.

There is but one help, and that is to destroy that terrible concentration of violence, with which those who succeed in getting to the height of power dominate the whole nation, and dominate the more surely, the more cruel and inhuman they are. This has been proven to us by Napoleon, Nicholas I, Bismarck, Chamberlain, Rhodes, and our own dictators, who rule the nation in the name of the Czar.

There is but one means for destroying this concentration of violence, and that is to awaken from the hypnosis of patriotism.

You must understand that you yourselves are causing all the evil from which you suffer, in that you submit to those suggestions by means of which you are deceived by the emperors, kings, members of parliaments, rulers, military men, capitalists, clergy, authors, and artists – by all those who need this deception of patriotism in order to be able to live by your labors.

Whoever you may be – a Frenchman, Russian, Pole, Englishman, Irishman, German, or Bohemian – you must understand that all our real human interests, whatever they be – agricultural, industrial, commercial, artistic, or scientific – all these interests, like all the pleasures and joys, in no way oppose the interests of the other nations and states. You are united with the men of the other nations by means of mutual interaction, exchange of services, the joy of a broad brotherly communion, and the exchange not only of wares, but also of sentiments.

You must understand that the questions as to who succeeds in seizing Wei-hai-wei,² Port Arthur, or Cuba – whether it is your government or another – are by no means a matter of indifference to you, but that every seizure made by your government is detrimental to you. It inevitably brings with it all kinds of influences, which your government will exert against you in order to compel you to take part in robberies and acts of violence, which are necessary for the seizures and for the retention of what has been seized. You must understand that your life can in no way be improved by whether Alsace will be German or French, or by the enslaving of Ireland and Poland. No matter whose they may be, you can live wherever you please, even if you are an Alsatian, an Irishman, or a Pole. You must understand that every fanning of patriotism will only make your position worse because the enslavement of your nation has resulted only from the struggle of patriotisms, and that every manifestation of patriotism in one nation increases the

² Transcriber's note – Also known as Weihai, the Weihai Garrison, and Port Edward during China's colonial period.

reaction against it in another. You must understand that you can save yourselves from all your calamities only when you free yourselves from the obsolete idea of patriotism and from the blind obedience to government that is based upon it, and when you shall boldly enter into the sphere of that higher idea of the brotherly union of the nations, which has long ago entered into life and is calling you to itself from all sides.

Let men understand that they are not the sons of any countries or governments, but the sons of God, and that, therefore, they cannot be slaves or enemies of other men, and all those senseless, now quite useless, pernicious institutions, bequeathed by antiquity, which are called governments, and all those sufferings, acts of violence, degradations, and crimes, which they bring with them, will disappear of their own accord.

Pirógovo, May 10, 1900

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