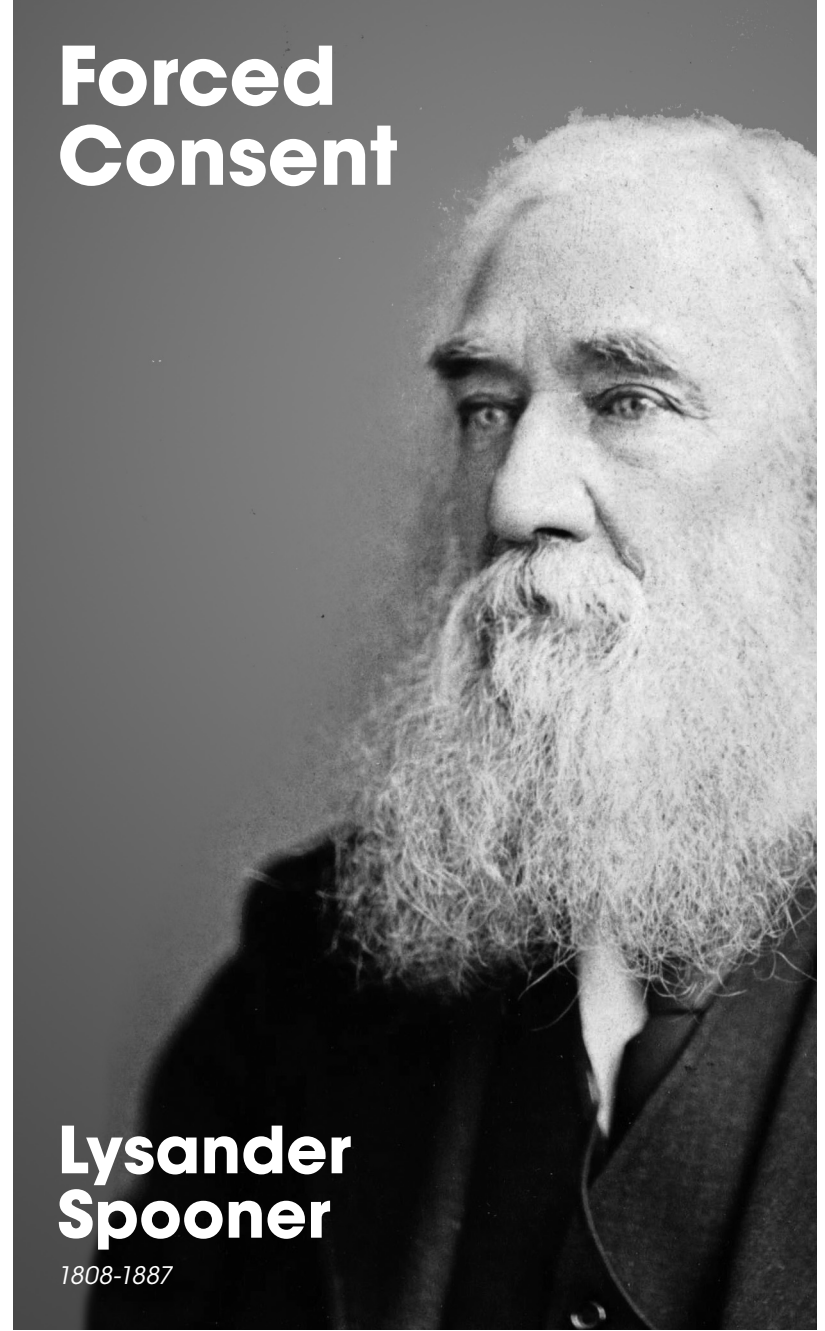


Voltaire
de Cleyre
1866-1912

Our
Present
Attitude



Forced
Consent

Lysander
Spooner

1808-1887

Forced Consent (1873) **by Lysander Spooner (1808-1887)**

Abraham Lincoln did not cause the death of so many people from a mere love of slaughter, but only to bring about a state of consent that could not otherwise be secured for the government he had undertaken to administer. When a government has once reduced its people to a state of consent – that is, of submission to its will – it can put them to a much better use than to kill them; for it can then plunder them, enslave them, and use them as tools for plundering and enslaving others. And these are the uses to which most governments, our own among the rest, do put their people, whenever they have once reduced them to a state of consent to its will. Andrew Jackson said that those who did not consent to the government he attempted to administer upon them, for that reason, were traitors, and ought to be hanged. Like so many other so-called “heroes,” he thought the sword and the gallows excellent instrumentalities for securing the people’s consent to be governed. The idea that, although government should rest on the consent of the governed, yet so much force may nevertheless be employed as may be necessary to produce that consent, embodies everything that was ever exhibited in the shape of usurpation and tyranny in any country on earth. It has cost this country a million of lives, and the loss of everything that resembles political liberty. It can have no place except as a part of a system of absolute military despotism. And it means nothing else either in this country, or in any other. There is no half-way house between a government depending wholly on voluntary support, and one depending wholly on military compulsion. And mankind have only to choose between these two classes – the class that governs, and the class that is governed or enslaved. In this case, the government rests wholly on the consent of the governors, and not at all on the consent of the governed. And whether the governors are more or less numerous than the governed, and whether they call themselves monarchists, aristocrats, or republicans, the principle is the same. The simple, and only material fact, in all cases, is, that one body of men are robbing and enslaving another. And it is only upon military compulsion that men will submit to be robbed and enslaved, it necessarily follows that any government, to which the governed, the weaker party, do not consent, must be (in regard to that weaker party), a merely military despotism. Such is the state of things now in this country, and in every other in which government does not depend wholly upon voluntary support. There never was and there never will be, a more gross, self-evident, and inexcusable violation of the principle that government should rest on the consent of the governed, than was the late war, as carried on by the North. There never was, and there never will be, a more palpable case of purely military despotism than is the government we now have.

The Word 2, no.8 (December 1873)

Mother Earth 3.2 (1908), pp. 78-80.

Face and outface – for these are times when “valor is discretion.”

sure that it is a very mistaken policy, and can have only wretched results. deny their Masters, do it out of reasoned conviction, and not cowardice; but I am also our comrades think and act otherwise. I am sure that most who thus act Peter and because I have been pained to see that in the present period of repression many of the side, by an open-eyed declaration than by any indirection. I say these things moreover, you stand far more chance of convincing him, or the indifferent man at eyes, he will accord you far more respect than when you shuffle and shrirk. And, It has been my experience that when you face an enemy and look him in the

Well, what of it? If this is the price to be paid for an idea, then let us pay. There is no need of being troubled about it, afraid, or ashamed. This is the time to stand up boldly and say, “Yes, I believe in the displacement of this system of injustice by a just one; I believe in the end of starvation, exposure, and the crimes caused by them; I believe in the human soul regnant over all laws which man has made or will make; I believe there is no peace now, and there never will be peace, so long as man rules over man; I believe in the total disintegration and dissolution of the principle and practice of authority; I am an Anarchist, and if for this you condemn me, I stand ready to receive your condemnation.”

and fear could invent was heaped upon it. This is an old, old story. the sins of the existing order were blamed at its door, and every calumny that rage they acted not as desperate men, but as theoretical Anarchists. Such has been the fate of every new idea which sought to penetrate the human mind and to uplift it; what they themselves say, no matter what we say, the majority of people will believe We must expect that such people will be called Anarchists, in advance. No matter whether our enemies or our friends, as the fated fruit of the existing “order” business to heap infamies upon his name, but to explain him as we explain others, denied victim of the present system does strike back at it, by violence, it is not our about save through the conquest of men’s minds. But when some desperate and life-For, truly, Anarchism has nothing in common with violence, and can never come not the business of Anarchists to preach wild and foolish acts, – acts of violence. Now, in times like these, wild outbreaks of desperation must be expected. It is useful people. And still the streets are full of beggars for the means of life.

victims of social injustice, who, under free conditions, would be active, energetic, stealing in preference to starving; the jails, the courts, the prisons, are full of these the people in whom natural instincts predominate over ordinary rules of action are whom Christian ethical instincts predominate are starving and dying in corners; Now, what has happened and what must continue to happen? The people in the elemental needs of humanity are being denied, – and denied to masses of men. elemental cries of humanity are swelling up in a frightful discordant chorus, because is the legal institution of property which has produced this condition, in which the

I wish a sharp distinction made between the legal institution of property, and property in the sense that what a man definitely produces by his own labor is his own. It or by some single political move (such as protection without restriction of immigration), or by the wickedness of human nature, or by blaming the “calamity press,” are compelled to “sit up and take notice”; but they do not perceive that it is the inevitable result of the whole politico-economic lie that man can be free and the institution of property continue to exist.

Those who imagine that industrial conditions can be made or unmade by this or when once the headwaters start on their outward course to the sea. foretold. It was no more to be avoided than the leap of Niagara is to be avoided, about a situation which both Socialists and Anarchists have all along foreseen and The present organization of society, working logically and inexorably, has brought by Voltaine de Cleve (1866-1912)

Our Present Attitude (1908)