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## Is Tolstoy Inconsistent?

By ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE.

In the June issue of the I.L.P. News, J. Bruce Glasier has a leading article the keynote of which is the glorious inconsistency of the great Russian teacher, with especial reference to his recent appeal to the Czar. But throughout the whole article I can find no proof of real inconsistency. Every statement of the kind only shows that his opinions have changed and developed during his whole life—as those of every independent thinker must change—and that his earlier *acts* are often opposed to his later *opinions* and *beliefs*. Not one fact is given to prove that Tolstoy has ever deliberately acted in opposition to the principles he held at the time. Probably, no living individual has more earnestly sought after the principles which should determine conduct, and, having arrived at what he believes to be such guiding principles, has so earnestly and so unselfishly adopted them to regulate his own life.

And the one special act which is supposed to form the culminating point of his inconsistency—his appeal to the Czar—is on the contrary perfectly consistent with all his later teachings; and it is to me very strange that neither Bruce Glasier, nor other writers who have expressed the same view, have seen this. For, what is this Appeal? If carefully read it will be seen that it is wholly and entirely in accordance with the fundamental principle of anarchism—the principle that government by force is wholly evil and is the source of almost all the unhappiness and misery of humanity. In accordance with this great principle he urges the Czar to forbid certain oppressive governmental acts, to repeal some of the most oppressive laws, and to abolish some of the most unjust, cruel, and degrading punishments. In no one case, so far as I remember, does he ask the Czar to do any one thing for the people, but simply to remove some of the fetters with which he has bound them, to leave them a little more free to do things for themselves. And yet Bruce Glasier can so mistake this grand appeal as to write—“The appeal to the Czar is an appeal to the State, and Tolstoy in issuing it has abandoned his anarchism. He has abandoned the principle that we must look to individual conversion and sanctification of life as the sole means of social regeneration, and he has thus definitely conceded the inutility of the central precept of his own Tolstoyan and anti-political creed.” Here are strong and positive statements without any reference to facts in support of them, and, I venture to say, wholly opposed to the facts. Tolstoy advocates non-resistance, but he does *not* advocate dumb acquiescence in wrong. He maintains that the whole fabric of compulsory government is wrong and evil, but he never teaches that it is wrong even to ask the head of the State to undo some of

its evil acts and allow the people a little opportunity to better their condition, to work out their own salvation. And he wisely limits himself to asking the repeal of a few only of the worst and most oppressive of the governmental acts which a just and humane man, even though a Czar, might be supposed to be able to see were not only tyrannical and cruel, but absolutely useless. Where is the inconsistency here? Where is the abandonment of principle? On the contrary, it is the appeal to pure anarchism. Tolstoy says, in effect,—“You think repressive and penal laws are necessary. I call your special attention to certain enactments, official acts and punishments, which, on consideration, you must see to be quite useless; very cruel, and highly injurious. Abolish these, and you will find that what I say is true. The people will be happier and more peaceable without them.” If this appeal were successful—as it yet may be—it would bring about the first instalment—a very small and insignificant instalment but of vital importance as a matter of principle—of the abolition of government by force; in other words the first step towards Anarchism.

In conclusion, I wish to say that I am a great admirer, though by no means a disciple, of Tolstoy. On several points I differ from him. He is sometimes unfair to his opponents, though this is usually from imperfect knowledge. But of all modern teachers he is, to my mind, the one against whom the charge of inconsistency can with the least justice be made.

We socialists should especially be careful in depreciating the work of the great thinker and moralist who is doing more than any other living writer to expose the evils of all government by force, and who maintains, as we do, that human nature is even now good enough and sensible enough, by voluntary combination, to protect itself against evil doers and to work out its own moral and physical well-being. I am myself wholly opposed to any attempt to establish a compulsory socialism (the very term is self-contradictory) as to all other governments by force, and I owe this conviction mainly to Tolstoy. Here, as in Russia, what we need first, is the repeal of bad laws, and especially of all those laws which either enforce or permit the existence of privileged classes, and of any inequality of opportunities as between man and man. Just in proportion as we are relieved from the most oppressive of the bonds and shackles with which our government binds our bodies and our minds, shall we adopt that system of voluntary co-operation for production as well as for all other useful purposes which will inevitably result, by a natural process of development, in a true Co-operative Commonwealth. In all this teaching we should hail Tolstoy as a master, and as a co-worker with us for the salvation of down-trodden humanity; and we should therefore be especially careful to avoid any unjust criticism, or any depreciation of his life and work which may tend to diminish their influence for good.

It is for this reason alone that I venture to oppose my view to that of so good a socialist as Bruce Glasier, and to maintain that, among all the great moral and political teachers of our age, Leo Tolstoy is among the greatest, if not the very greatest of all, that he is the most truly consistent in his life and conduct, and therefore the most worthy of our admiration and respect. We need not hold him to be infallible. He should not be exempt from criticism. But when we do criticise we should deal with important matters only, and above all things we should avoid dwelling upon vague generalities which, while not affecting the great question of the truth or error in his main contentions, yet tend to diminish his influence upon the rising generation.

A charge of almost universal inconsistency between his principles and his conduct, if well founded, must certainly have this effect, and I have therefore thought it my duty to say a few words to show, that on the main point, the address to the Czar, and I believe also on most if not all other points, the charge is an unfounded one.

### A Note of Explanation.

The foregoing contribution from the pen of Alfred Russell Wallace adds greatly to the interest of the present issue of the *I.L.P. News*; and I need not assure our comrade, whose life-work as a naturalist and social reformer reflects so much lustre upon our Socialist comradeship, that any words of his will be read with deep interest and respect by us all. I feel doubtful, however, if I should entice into further controversy in this little paper one whose time and energy are so valuable. I shall, therefore, only refer to a few points in the hope that the issue raised by my article, which Dr. Wallace disputes, may be made clearer between us.

And first let me say that I acknowledge to the full the immense genius of Tolstoy. In point of sheer mental capacity and moral bigness, he stands out among the greatest figures of the present-day world. Nor does the circumstance that he intuitively postures in the prophet-garb of humility lessen to my mind his positive greatness as a teacher. It is, indeed, because I recognise the inordinate persuasiveness of Tolstoy's character and writings that I was tempted to write the article to which Dr. Wallace has, in quite kind terms, taken exception. Nor was it my intention to deny that Tolstoy has striven sincerely enough to shape his conduct into conformity with his creed. What I tried to do, briefly, rather was to show that his effort to do that was an impossible one, because indeed his creed itself is impossible as a practical theory of conduct in organised society.

There may be, in the Tolstoyan sense, a kingdom of God within us and without us, but there is a kingdom of the devil within and without us, also. This kingdom of the devil is the kingdom of individual self, and the kingdom of God is the kingdom of the social self derived from society or social culture. It is not, therefore, by believing that all that he regards as good within himself is God that a man attains to his humanity or godlikeness, but by enlarging his whole self with the interest, intelligence, sympathy, and admiration aroused by association with his fellows without. Tolstoy's persuasion, therefore, to concern ourselves with the little acquired good

within us is a persuasion fraught with peril of atrophy to our moral nature. And, indeed, we are not lacking evidence in our own day and our land that many evangelicals, Christian and Tolstoyan, speedily become sadly selfish and unpleasant neighbours.

That Tolstoy himself is, in the main, a highly socialised and humane man is, I contend, because he is in himself and in his career and works not a product of himself or his creed, but a product of the social culture and social statutes of the age and the sphere in which he has lived. Had he been born an ignorant Russian peasant—not to speak of an Australian aboriginal—needless to say he never would have been Leo Tolstoy.

It is, therefore, our social habitat or environment that is all important; not merely the little environment that we can alter with the immediate touch of our hands or reach of our voice—but the environment of the Nation—of the world itself, which we can only alter, moralise, and improve by national and international effort. And to do that most effectually we must co-operate in our capacity as citizens. Collective effort to alter collective conditions—that, as my friend, Dr. Martin, puts it, is the sum of all social progress. And that is political action.

It is through the State, which is our collective selves—not through our isolated individual selves—that the State, which is all of us, can be saved.

This Tolstoy has realised, despite his anarchism; hence his appeal to the State. Nor does it essentially matter whether he appeals to members of heads of the State as individuals, so long as he appeals to the State or society at all. Nor, further, does it matter whether he appeals only to the negative power of the State—asking the State merely to cease to act wrongfully by abolishing bad laws or privileges, or whether he appeals to the positive power of the State to make good laws. For every negative action involves a positive one. Thou shalt *not* be unjust, and thou *shalt* be just, are one and the same. The very giving and allowing of national freedom of any kind institutes a State law.

I hope I have made clear to Dr. Wallace that speaking of Tolstoy's inconsistency I was making "no railing accusation" against him.

J. BRUCE GLASIER.

### PROFITS EXCEED CAPITAL.

The seventh ordinary general meeting of J. Lyons & Co., Ltd., was held at the Trocadero Restaurant, London, on June 6th, under the presidency of Mr. Joseph Lyons, who said they would be able to form some idea of the gigantic turnover of the company when they saw that the gross profits for the year amounted to the sum of £297,435, and when they took into consideration the fact that the paid-up capital was £270,000, they would agree that on a moderate tariff such as theirs to arrive at a gross profit so much in excess of the capital spoke volumes for the possibilities of the business. The board had already distributed an interim dividend at the rate of 22½ per cent. per annum, and they recommended to-day a final dividend at the rate of 30 per cent. per annum for the last half-year.

For, after all, a railway, school board, rise in the world, athletic sports, in which professionals contend for gate money, cricket and polo, gin, beer, and fun, with snobbism and cads, a "smart set," interest in the welfare of mankind, nice taste in literature, with strainings at the circulating library for the first reading of "Red Porridge" and the like, do not exactly constitute a life. And so it seems to me that the introduction of our northern life, our railways, steamboats, cotton mills, and class distinctions, comes but as a curse to those whose lives nature intended to progress upon other paths.—R. B. Cunningham-Graham, in the *Saturday Review*.