

PATRIOTISM AND GOVERNMENT

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649261840

Patriotism and Government by Leo Tolstoy

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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THE FREE AGE PRESS
13, PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON.

1901

JC 329
T 63

3 8 17

"The time was fast approaching when to call a man a patriot would be the deepest insult you could offer him. Patriotism now meant advocating plunder in the interests of the privileged classes of the particular State system into which we had happened to be born."

E. BELFORT BAX.

PATRIOTISM AND GOVERNMENT



CHAPTER I

I HAVE already several times expressed the thought that the feeling of patriotism is in our day an unnatural, irrational, and harmful feeling, and is the cause of a great part of the ills from which mankind is suffering; and that, consequently, this feeling should not be cultivated, as is now being done, but should, on the contrary, be suppressed and eradicated by all means available to rational men. Yet, strange to say, though it is undeniable that the universal armaments and the destructive wars which are ruining the peoples result from that one feeling, all my arguments showing the backwardness, anachronism, and harmfulness of patriotism have been met, and are still met, either by silence, or by intentional misconception, or by a strange unvarying reply to the effect that only bad

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patriotism (Jingoism, or Chauvinism) is bad, but that real, good patriotism is a very elevated moral feeling, to condemn which is not only irrational but wicked.

As to what this real, good patriotism consists of nothing at all is said; or, if anything is said, instead of explanation we get declamatory, inflated phrases; or, finally, something else is substituted for patriotism, something which has nothing in common with the patriotism we all know, and from the results of which we all suffer so severely.

It is generally said that the real, good patriotism consists in desiring for one's own people or State such real benefits as do not infringe the well-being of other nations.

Talking, recently, to an Englishman about the present war, I said to him that the real cause of the war was not avarice, as is generally said, but patriotism, as is evident from the temper of the whole English society. The Englishman did not agree with me, and said that even were the case so, it resulted from the fact that the patriotism at present inspiring Englishmen is a bad patriotism; but that good patriotism, such as he was imbued with, consists in Englishmen, his compatriots, acting well.

"Then do you wish only Englishmen to act well?" I asked.

"I wish all men to do so," said he; indicating clearly by that reply the characteristic of true benefits—whether moral,

scientific, or even material and practical,—which is that they spread out to all men; and therefore to wish such benefits to anyone, not only is not patriotic, but is the reverse of patriotic.

Neither are the peculiarities of each people patriotism; though these things are purposely substituted for the conception of patriotism by its defenders. They say that the peculiarities of each people are an essential condition of human progress, and that therefore patriotism, which seeks to maintain those peculiarities is a good and useful feeling. But is it not quite evident that if, once upon a time, these peculiarities of each people—these customs, creeds, languages—were conditions necessary for the life of humanity, yet in our time these same peculiarities form the chief obstacle to what is already recognised as an ideal—the brotherly union of the peoples? And therefore the maintenance and defence of any nationality—Russian, German, French, or Anglo-Saxon, provoking the corresponding maintenance and defence not only of Hungarian, Polish, and Irish nationalities, but also of Basque, Provençal, Mordvinian, Tchouvásh, and many other nationalities—serves not to harmonise and unite men, but to estrange and divide them more and more from one another.

So that not the imaginary but the real patriotism, which we all know, by which most people to-day are swayed, and from which humanity suffers so