

Declaration of Rights

Percy Bysshe Shelley

1812

(1) Government has no rights; it is a delegation from several individuals for the purpose of securing their own. It is therefore just, only so far as it exists by their consent, useful only so far as it operates to their well-being.

(2) If these individuals think that the form of government which they, or their forefathers constituted is ill adapted to produce their happiness, they have a right to change it.

(3) Government is devised for the security of rights. The rights of man are liberty, and an equal participation of the commonage of nature.

(4) As the benefit of the governed, is, or ought to be the origin of government, no men can have any authority that does not expressly emanate from their will.

(5) Though all governments are not so bad as that of Turkey, yet none are so good as they might be; the majority of every country have a right to perfect their government, the minority should not disturb them, they ought to secede, and form their own system in their own way.

(6) All have a right to an equal share in the benefits and burdens of Government. Any disabilities for opinion, imply by their existence, barefaced tyranny on the side of government, ignorant slavishness on the side of the governed.

(7) The rights of man in the present state of society, are only to be secured by some degree of coercion to be exercised on their violator. The sufferer has a right that the degree of coercion employed be as slight as possible.

(8) It may be considered as plain proof of the hollowness of any proposition, if power be used to enforce instead of reason to persuade its admission. Government is never supported by fraud until it cannot be supported by reason.

(9) No man has a right to disturb the public peace, by personally resisting the execution of a law however bad. He ought to acquiesce, using at the same time the utmost powers of his reason, to promote its repeal.

(10) A man must have a right to act in a certain manner before it can be his duty. He may, before he ought.

(11) A man has a right to think as his reason directs, it is a duty he owes himself to think with freedom, that he may act from conviction.

(12) A man has a right to unrestricted liberty of discussion, falsehood is a scorpion that will sting itself to death.

(13) A man has not only a right to express his thoughts, but it is his duty to do so.

(14) No law has a right to discourage the practice of truth. A man ought to speak the truth on every occasion; a duty can never be criminal, what is not criminal cannot be injurious.

(15) Law cannot make what is in its nature virtuous or innocent, to be criminal, any more than it can make what is criminal to be innocent. Government cannot make a law, it can only pronounce that which was the law before its organization, viz. the moral result of the imperishable relations of things.

(16) The present generation cannot bind their posterity. The few cannot promise for the many.

(17) No man has a right to do an evil thing that good may come.

(18) Expediency is inadmissible in morals. Politics are only sound when conducted on principles of morality. They are, in fact, the morals of nations.

(19) Man has no right to kill his brother, it is no excuse that he does so in uniform. He only adds the infamy of servitude to the crime of murder.

(20) Man, whatever be his country, has the same rights in one place as another, the rights of universal citizenship.

(21) The government of a country ought to be perfectly indifferent to every opinion. Religious differences, the bloodiest and most rancorous of all, spring from partiality.

(22) A delegation of individuals, for the purpose of securing their rights, can have no undelegated power of restraining the expression of their opinion.

(23) Belief is involuntary; nothing involuntary is meritorious or reprehensible, A man ought not to be considered worse or better for his belief.

(24) A Christian, a Deist, a Turk, and a Jew, have equal rights: they are men and brethren.

(25) If a person's religious ideas correspond not with your own, love him nevertheless. How different would yours have been, had the chance of birth placed you in Tartary or India!

(26) Those who believe that Heaven is, what earth has been, a monopoly in the hands of a favored few, would do well to reconsider their opinion: if they find that it came from their priest or their grandmother, they could not do better than reject it.

(27) No man has a right to be respected for any other possessions, but those of virtue and talents. Titles are tinsel, power a corruptor, glory a bubble, and excessive wealth, a libel on its possessor.

(28) No Man has a right to monopolize more than he can enjoy; what the rich give to the poor, whilst millions are starving, is not a perfect favour, but an imperfect right.

(29) Every man has a right to a certain degree of leisure and liberty, because it is his duty to attain a certain degree of knowledge. He may before he ought.

(30) Sobriety of body and mind is necessary to those who would be free, because, without sobriety a high sense or philanthropy cannot actuate the heart, nor cool and determined courage, execute its dictates.

(31) The only use of government is to repress the vices of man. If man were to day sinless, to-morrow he would have a right to demand that government and all its evils should cease. Man!, thou whose rights are here declared, be no longer forgetful of the loftiness of thy destination. Think of thy rights; of those possessions which will give thee virtue and wisdom, by which thou mayest arrive at happiness and freedom. They are declared to thee by one who knows thy dignity, for every hour does his heart swell with honorable pride in the contemplation of what thou mayest attain, by one who is not forgetful of thy degeneracy, for every moment brings home to him the bitter conviction of what thou art.

AWAKE ! - ARISE - OR BE FOREVER FALLEN

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