



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on January 11, 2011

If You Don't Pay This Tax, We'll Shoot Your Dog

German sociologist and political economist Max Weber once defined a state as an institution that “successfully upholds a claim on the monopoly of the legitimate use of violence in the enforcement of its order.” States, of course, prefer not to be thought of in such terms, so they generally couch their employment of force in less threatening phrases, such as “helping the poor” rather than “robbing the rich,” creating “collateral damage” rather than “murdering innocents,” or even (as Bill Clinton would have it) “accepting contributions” rather than “collecting taxes.” Let someone get in the state’s way, however, and the velvet glove comes off, revealing the iron fist underneath.



Such is the case in the Swiss village of Reconvilier, where, [according to the Associated Press](#), local official Pierre-Alain Nemitz is threatening to execute dogs whose owners refuse to pay the village’s annual \$50 dog tax. Under a 1904 law, Nemitz says, the village government has the right to kill a dog if its owner won’t cough up the cash.

Apparently the 2,245 residents of Reconvilier think that the money they’ve earned and the 280 dogs they own belong to them and not the government. That is not how Nemitz, like most government officials, sees things. As far as he is concerned, everything is the property of the state, and those who persist in the foolish belief that they actually *own* things deserve to be punished until they see the light, even to the point of shooting their schnauzers.

Thus, “this isn’t about a mass execution of dogs,” according to Nemitz. “It’s meant to put pressure on people who don’t cooperate.” The threat to kill canines is, therefore, simply a means to an end: extracting money by force from the populace. If a few dachshunds end up dead in the process, well, they’re just “collateral damage.”

If a local bar owner were to threaten to murder your mutt unless you made good on your unpaid tab — a debt that, unlike taxes, you voluntarily ran up — he would probably be charged with extortion and various other crimes. For the institution with a monopoly on violence, however, this is just business as usual. In fact, any dog owner who resists either paying the tax or having his poodle plugged will be treated as a criminal while the extortionist goes free.

The residents of Reconvilier would be wise to see to it that this doggone law gets changed to protect their pooches. In the meantime, Rover had better watch his back.



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