

worked 12 to 18 hours a day at least six days a week. Child labor was required for most families to survive. Horses and oxen plowed fields and pulled wagons. Electrical power did not exist. The internal combustion engine was a hundred years away. There was no running water in homes. Life was hard. We know what we have today by contrast. Wages have reached a level unprecedented in any economy. We produce in an hour what it took our forefathers a week to produce. We travel in five hours a distance that took them six months. One half of all the goods produced in the past 10,000 years have been produced in the United States in the past two hundred.

"Oh, but capitalism failed dismally during the Depression," someone says. The answer is that the whole complex of make-work projects, WPA, PWA, CCC and the rest, did nothing for the economy.

Today the beneficent oak which was our strength is in trouble. The problem is big, centralized government which has encrusted the roots and branches with such parasitical mushrooms as CAB, EPA, EEOC, FAA, FCC, FPC, FTC, ICC, NLRB, OSHA and SEC. All these bureaucratic regulatory agencies have grown at the expense of our free enterprise system. They exercise control over our lives, telling us and the businesses we own and for which we work what we can and cannot do.

Not one of these burdensome bureaus was required to make America's economy the greatest on earth.

One Control Leads to Others

Experience with human action shows that there can't be a little socialism, any more than a man can partly murder or a woman be partly pregnant—there can only be a lot. Every measure to control any aspect of the economy dislocates some other aspect or activity. The latter, being closely tied in, therefore requires control in turn. The great oak can give its vitality to mistletoe and still thrive, but there comes a point when any parasite will destroy its host. The pretty bindweed with its bright pink morning-glory blossoms must be snipped off at the root or it will strangle the chrysanthemum and the rose. Let political direction invade any area of economic or cultural life and it constricts, winding itself round and round sprouting vested interests bound to insure its perpetuation. Then farmers insist that we continue to pay them not to farm, educators raven for federal funds and direction, we have "urban renewal" fiascos, womb-to-tomb paternalism.

Can we frame a plan or elect a planner that will efface in other people a myriad intellectual errors and emotional compulsions? Who would be so rash as to claim he can dispel every mistaken notion from his friend, or indeed even from himself?

Socialism, as Leonard Read constantly reminded us, will wither away when we fix our attention on a better idea. Looking back on the process, we shall hardly know at what point the unsound idea was replaced by a sound one. We need a growing comprehension of the miracle of the free market, a sort of Gresham's law in reverse: a good idea driving out a bad one.

Historically, with sporadic but blessed exceptions, government has shackled and robbed. In a free society, instead, it would be limited to protecting against violence and fraud. Healthy growth would proceed naturally from the innate impulse of every person to improve his situation.

The Key to Progress

Capitalism challenges us to save, invest, invent new tools and better methods, employ others in the endeavor to maximize earnings by providing an improved product at lower cost. But more than that, there is a relationship between a life in business and a stable and mature adult personality. Here we have, not a faultless, but to a measurable degree a rational and even humane system of rewards in return for productive effort expended. Private enterprise can produce more sensibly motivated and competently educated children, more creative ferment in the arts, better sensitized

achievable and spontaneous social conscience, and so on through the categories of meaningful life.

The ethics of enforced altruism, as in China, will play itself out sooner or later. Here is the way things should be: each person with eyes on his own aspirations, spiritual and material, not on another's satisfaction. When each makes the most of himself or herself—enlightened self-interest—then each becomes your and my servant unknowingly. Paradoxical as it sounds, in a free society, with all too human exceptions, every man and woman is going about doing what he or she wants to do.

The vital distinction between the market economy and the welfare state is simply rights and opportunities *versus* handouts. Our real problem is overgrown government. Its rightful function is to implement justice according to agreed-upon rules, to keep the peace, maintain a fair field with no favoritism. Let each of us put this question to himself: Do we genuinely believe in the free market for the conduct of creative activities as superior to controlled exchange, whether in industry, farming, education, or whatever? If the answer is yes, we are making progress in understanding freedom.

With his manuscript, Professor Crum offered his list of some 87 volumes of references or readings on liberty. A copy of that list is available on request.