Clipping of Note NUMBER 53

CAUSE OF CORRUPT GOVERNMENT

A PRECISION TOOL designed for one purpose will be entirely ineffective—nay, it may even be destroyed—in an attempt to use it for another purpose. Every housewife knows that you cannot use an electric dishwasher as a garbage disposal unit. Yet, the same American people who know so much about tools and the use of tools have completely lost sight of the purpose, object, and use of the tool of government. Government is not now regarded merely as an instrument to restrain men from injuring one another but as a sort of all-purpose, around-the-clock device to make men happy and secure from the cradle to the grave. It is this perversion of government that now makes it both ridiculous and corrupt. Government does not create liberty; on the contrary, government is the one persisting danger to human liberty. Forty years ago, Woodrow Wilson said: "The history of Liberty is a history of limitations of governmental powers, not the increase of it. When we resist, therefore, the concentration of power, we are resisting the processes of death, because concentration of power is what always precedes the destruction of human liberties."

This role of government as the enemy of liberty was well understood by the founding fathers of the Republic. They wished government to have sufficient power to "restrain men from injuring one another." But beyond that, they tied it down securely with constitutional limitations, separation of powers, bills of rights, and other legal barriers and barbed wire entanglements. When somebody asked James Madison, the father of the Constitution, how such a crippled and restricted government could be expected to function, he replied: "But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary." And he further stated that our government is based on "the capacity of mankind for self-government"—in other words, upon the ability of each man to control and govern himself according to the commandments of his Creator. As men lose the power and the desire for self-control and self-reliance under God, government moves in to take up the slack. One hundred years before the Declaration of Independence was written, William Penn anticipated the foregoing conclusions of the founding fathers when he said that the people who will not be governed by God will be ruled by tyrants. This was true in Penn's time, and it is true in our own time. The growth of government evidences the shrinkage of the American people in their capacity and in their desire to control and govern themselves.

A swelling is one of the infallible signs of a sickness underneath, and the swelling of government in America today merely evidences the moral sickness of the people under it. Big government is for little people. The better the people, the less necessity there is for government. This simple, vicarious relationship between the citizen and his government is obscured today in the fog of our confused political councils. It is unfortunate that we regard the growth of government as "progressive liberalism" and the so-called "natural evolution of the democratic process." This is the great error that has fabricated the fog which causes our confusion. This is the error that interrupts the peaceful process of American production and confounds our purpose in fighting the Communists at home and abroad.

We cannot defeat communism abroad by the simple device of giving government more and more power at home. Remember that communism is merely the climax of despotic governmental power; and as the concentration of the powers of our own government becomes greater and greater, we rapidly take on the likeness of the enemy we are trying to defeat. In this process, we are not defeating communism; we are rather surrendering to it.

Government is no longer contained behind the walls of the Constitution. It roams where it pleases, throughout every walk of life and throughout every department of business. From workers to wages to materials to products, the government is everywhere. We no longer have a government of laws; we have government by 100,000 roving all-powerful agents of government. In sheer desperation, the American citizen now tries to appease these representatives of government with blandishments—sometimes with bribes and corruption. Governmental corruption is not the fault of the administration nor of any man nor group of men in government. Governmental corruption is a necessary consequence of the unreasonable, unconstitutional, and scandalous concentration of power which Woodrow Wilson warned us about 40 years ago. Unless this scandalous concentration of power is dissolved, corruption will not only continue, it will grow worse—and this regardless of the political complexion or personal honesty of the president of the United States.

Extracted from an address by Clarence Manion, Dean of the College of Law, Notre Dame University, before the Annual Meeting of the National Small Business Men's Association, Washington, April 1, 1952.

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