Clipping of Note NUMBER 54

How Government Grows

THE POWER OF government usually grows in this manner: A specific situation attracts the sympathy or disapproval of one or more sincere citizens. They, in turn, call this situation to the attention of one or more sincere legislators. The situation so impresses the well-intentioned citizens and legislators that they jump to the conclusion: "There ought to be a law."

Seldom does the particular problem or situation apply to each of the 156 million American citizens. But the law that deals with the problem *does* apply equally to all. The results which flow from this fact are not always what the authors and proponents of the particular law had in mind.

In the hands of its interpreters and administrators, a new law—a grant of power to government—becomes an invitation to expand. As soon as the law is passed, the question arises as to whether or not it applies in this or that particular situation. Some of these may be like the original case, and others may not. But decisions must be made. The executive—or, more likely, an administrative clerk or junior legal counsel—generally decides that it does apply. This is understandable; not only is he a "hard-working and patriotic public servant upholding law and order," but also the scope of his bureau, branch, or department of government is thereby increased. It is the accepted political way "to get ahead." Liberal interpretations of new grants of power mean more work and more jobs for more administrators—at the expense of the freedom and the income of the forgotten taxpayers.

If the law happens to be one under which certain citizens can qualify for some "benefit," these citizens are all too willing to help the administrator expand his job and power. And the minds and imaginations of many hundreds of thousands of other citizens are stimulated to invent ways and means of also "qualifying for the benefits"—and then increasing them. Thus the force arising from the creative imaginations of millions of citizens is added to the force that is created by the natural desire of government administrators to increase their power. All join in seeking to enlarge the scope of the law because each sees a way of gaining from it. This hope of gain is the most powerful expansive force on earth. It is this force that can conquer a wilderness and create the greatest industrial society ever known. But if this natural hope of gain is turned by law in another direction, it can—and will—create the largest and most powerfully concentrated government ever devised by man. In fact, *it has*—in our own country as well as abroad.

The maximum flow of creative human energy and the utmost in voluntary co-operation among individual free men are called forth only when government is limited to the equal *protection* of the inherent rights of free and responsible human beings. To the extent that this basic life principle of a free society is implemented and safeguarded within a nation, the people of that nation will achieve balanced development and growth. Most of our reform laws violate this basic principle in that they penalize the producer and reward the "free rider" who consumes more than he produces. Thus the flow of creative human energy is increasingly inhibited as "liberal" laws authorize more and more unearned withdrawals from the stream of goods and services provided by the producers.

The citizens of America are now entrapped in a vicious circle. The administrators must necessarily have more and more tax money if they are to enlarge the scope of their activities under new laws to "help the people." The increase of taxes causes the citizens to try even harder to qualify for the benefits, in order to regain some of the money that was taken from them to finance previous laws.

Hence it is that *additional* problems initiated and intensified by each new law almost always exceed the problem which the law was designed to alleviate in the first place. This could continue until the taxpayer is extinguished and the government is in complete control. It has happened several times before in history.

The only way to avoid this end result is to avoid passing the law that starts it on its way or—if it is already in existence—to get rid of it. We must remember that the principal instrument of government is coercion and that our government officials are no more moral, omnipotent, nor omniscient than are any of the rest of us. Once we understand the basic principles which must be observed if freedom is to be safeguarded against government, we may become more hesitant in turning our personal problems and responsibilities over to that agency of coercion, with its insatiable appetite for power. The hour is late, and we have much to learn.

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