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SEERSHIP

A SEER, according to Webster, is a person gifted with extraordinary insight — usually of a spiritual and ethical nature. The term is seldom applied except to a rare few persons, and then, usually in retrospect. We hardly ever think of one of our contemporaries as a seer regardless of how penetrating his vision. For the most part we confer this distinction only on those of the dim and ancient past and observe that a few men comprehended sound principles and saw what bearing these principles had on the survival of their society and its future. We regard as seers the few whom time has proven to have had foresight.

Seeing into the nature of things is a venture in perceptiveness or consciousness. A certain amount of this lies at the root of all good societies, for without it they perish. Thus, seeing is of first importance as related to survival, and it is immediately relevant to the social, economic, moral, and political problems of the U.S.A. right now!

Whether or not historians of a millennium hence will endow any of us with the accolade, “seer,” is of no consequence whatsoever. At best, seeing is a relative attribute; no seer ever saw very far except in relation to those who saw less. The cosmos still has a few secrets! Yet, we exist or perish by the quality or depth of our seeing and, therefore, striving to be seers is an earthly objective as high as one can set.

There were numerous seers among the Greeks of 500-300 B.C., and a remarkable civilization evolved. But even these men did not see everything—for instance, the evil of infanticide as a means of limiting population; nor did they see the flaw in human slavery. There were other failures in seeing which, added to a subsequent decline in quality and quantity of seers, relegated Greek glory to the past.

The rise and decline of the Roman Empire

assuredly followed the rise and decline of Roman seers.

FREDERIC BASTIAT in his essay, “That Which Is Seen and That Which Is Not Seen,” illustrates a down-to-earth aspect of this point by having a hoodlum hurl a rock through the window of a baker’s shop. The crowd saw only advantage in this disaster: more business for the glazier, added jobs, and so on. The crowd, composed of bad economists, was able to see only what first met the eye.¹

Millions of Americans today, when contemplating two power plants, one belonging to TVA, the other an investor-owned plant, will see only that they look alike, are made of the same stuff, have similar equipment, produce “juice” of identical quality, and that the KWHs from the former sell for less. Being bad economists, they fail to see the economic and other disadvantages of coercion on which the TVA plant is founded or the economic and other advantages of voluntary exchange on which the investor-owned plant rests. Their inability to see, their shortsightedness, must lead to socialism, to the omnipotent state.²

Numberless people in and out of political office see their own or other people’s “need” but, like Robin Hood, see no harm at all in extorting funds from the general citizenry to gratify their unbalanced instincts.

People must inevitably arrive at a socialistic conclusion unless they become aware of—the almost miraculous manner in which the innumerable, varied, creative human energies

¹ For a full explanation of “the broken window fallacy,” taken from Bastiat’s *Ce qu’on voit et ce qu’on ne voit pas*, see *Economics In One Lesson* by Henry Hazlitt, page 15. A copy of this 143-page paperback may be obtained from FEE at 50¢. Use order form.

² See “The Seen and the Unseen,” *The Freeman*, October 1957. Reprint of article on request from FEE. No charge. Use order form.