Clipping of Note

NUMBER 37

Legalized Immorality

It must be remembered that ninety-five per cent of the peace, order and welfare existing in human society is always produced by the conscientious practice of man-to-man justice and person-to-person charity. When any part of this important domain of personal virtue is transferred to government, that part is automatically released from the restraints of morality and put into the area of conscience-less coercion. The field of personal responsibility is thus reduced at the same time and to the same extent that the boundaries of irresponsibility are enlarged.

Government cannot manage these fields of human welfare with the justice, economy and effectiveness that is possible when these same fields are the direct responsibility of morally sensitive human beings. This loss of justice, economy and effectiveness is increased in the proportion that such governmental management is centralized. . . .

Government cannot make men good; neither can it make them prosperous and happy. The evils in society are directly traceable to the vices of individual human beings. At its best government may simply attack the secondary manifestations of these vices. Their primary manifestations are found in the pride, covetousness, lust, envy, sloth and plain incompetency of individual people. When government goes far beyond this simple duty and deploys its forces along a broad complicated front, under a unified command, it invariably propagates the very evils that it is designed to reduce.

In the sweet name of "human welfare" such a government begins to do things that would be gravely offensive if done by individual citizens. The government is urged to follow this course by people who consciously or subconsciously seek an impersonal outlet for the "primaries" of human weakness. An outlet in other words which will enable them to escape the moral responsibility that would be involved in their personal commission of these sins. As a convenience to this popular attitude we are assured that "government should do for the people what the people are unable to do for themselves." This is an extremely dangerous definition of the purpose of government. It is radically different from the purpose stated in the Declaration of Independence; nevertheless it is now widely accepted as correct.

Here is one example of centralized governmental operation: Paul wants some of Peter's property. For moral as well as legal reasons, Paul is unable personally to accomplish this desire. Paul therefore persuades the government to tax Peter in order to provide funds with which the government pays Paul a "subsidy." Paul now has what he wanted. His conscience is clear and he has proceeded "according to law." Who could ask for more?—why, Paul, of course, and at the very next opportunity. There is nothing to stop him now *except the eventual exhaustion of Peter's resources.*

The fact that there are millions of Pauls and Peters involved in such transactions does not change their essential and common characteristic. The Pauls have simply engaged the government "to do for them (the people) that which they are unable to do for themselves." Had the Pauls done this individually and directly without the help of the government, each of them would have been subject to fine and imprisonment. Furthermore, ninety-five per cent of the Pauls would have refused to do this job because the moral conscience of each Paul would have hurt him if he did. However, where government does it for them, there is no prosecution and no pain in anybody's conscience. This encourages the unfortunate impression that by using the ballot instead of a blackjack we may take whatever we please to take from our neighbor's store of rights and immunities.

Extracted from pages 36-39 of The Key to Peace, by Clarence Manion, Dean of the College of Law of Notre Dame University. Published 1950 by The Heritage Foundation, Inc., 75 East Wacker Drive, Chicago 1, Ill. 121 pages; $2.00

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