On Minding One's Own Business

I HAVE SAID that we have an empirical political economy and social science to fit the distortions of our society. The test of empiricism in this matter is the attitude which one takes up toward *laissez faire*. It no doubt wounds the vanity of a philosopher who is just ready with a new solution of the universe to be told to mind his own business. So he goes on to tell us that if we think that we shall, by being let alone, attain to perfect happiness on earth, we are mistaken. The half-way men—the professorial socialists—join him. They solemnly shake their heads, and tell us that he is right—that letting us alone will never secure us perfect happiness. Under all this lies the familiar logical fallacy, never expressed, but really the point of the whole, that we *shall* get perfect happiness if we put ourselves in the hands of the world-reformer.

We never supposed that *laissez faire* would give us perfect happiness. We have left perfect happiness entirely out of our account. If the social doctors will mind their own business, we shall have no troubles but what belong to Nature. Those we will endure or combat as we can. What we desire is, that the friends of humanity should cease to add to them. Our disposition toward the ills which our fellow-man inflicts on us through malice or meddling is quite different from our disposition toward the ills which are inherent in the conditions of human life.

To mind one's own business is a purely negative and unproductive injunction, but, taking social matters as they are just now, it is a sociological principle of the first importance. There might be developed a grand philosophy on the basis of minding one's own business.

—*William Graham Sumner*

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Unemployment

UNEMPLOYMENT is one of the most senseless and unnatural phenomena ever to descend on man. Any improvement in the arrangement and use of resources in the world depends on human labor. Man must sustain his life through labor. That is as certain as day and night. And yet millions of people are unemployed.

The news media announce it, the educators lament it, politicians condemn it, and governments allocate public funds to eradicate it. No other economic phenomenon receives as much public attention as unemployment. Despite such popular condemnation, unemployment persists, holding millions of Americans in its deadly grip.

Unemployment is a political disease which springs from the primitive but popular notion that government can improve everyone's income and working conditions by legislation and regulation, and that labor combinations can exact higher incomes and better conditions through collective bargaining. It is an affliction that stems from misinterpretation and misinformation about work and income and from an undaunted faith in collective force and coercion. As such, it clearly reflects the spirit and mentality of our age.

The rate of unemployment is directly proportional to the force applied to raise the cost of labor. Force may be applied by the victims themselves acting collectively through properly certified labor unions, or by governments enacting laws and imposing regulations that raise labor costs. But in final analysis, unemployment descends from the vague supposition that collective force is capable of improving the economic conditions of working people.

There are no "instant" solutions to the phenomenon of unemployment, no painless recipes or political prescriptions. There are no coercive cures or remedies that create jobs for the jobless. Labor will be fully employed when its application is profitable and adds value to production.

The way to alleviate unemployment is to reduce the coercion of minimum wage legislation, fringe benefit mandates, and union rates and rules. It is to restore freedom in the labor market, which permits the cost of labor to readjust to the true level of productivity.

——*Hans F. Sennholz*

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