

Frederic Bastiat, a French economist, statesman, and author who died in 1850, wrote a remarkable book called *The Law*. As a deputy to the legislative assembly, Mr. Bastiat opposed the socialism to which France was rapidly turning at the time. In the course of his opposition, he explained each socialist fallacy as it appeared:

This question of legal plunder must be settled once and for all, and there are only three ways to settle it:

- 1) The few plunder the many.
- 2) Everybody plunders everybody.
- 3) Nobody plunders anybody.

It is impossible to introduce into society a greater change and a greater evil than this: A conversion of the law into an instrument of plunder. What are the consequences of such a perversion? It would require volumes to describe them all. Thus we must content ourselves with pointing out the most striking.

In the first place, it erases from everyone's conscience the distinction between justice and injustice.

No society can exist unless the laws are respected to a certain degree. The safest way to make laws respected is to make them respectable. When law and morality contradict each other, the citizen has the cruel alternative of either losing his moral sense or losing his respect for the law.

These two evils are of equal consequence, and it would be difficult for a person to choose between them.

The nature of law is to maintain

justice. This is so much the case that, in the minds of the people, law and justice are one and the same thing. There is in all of us a strong disposition to believe that anything lawful is also legitimate. This belief is so widespread that many persons have erroneously held that things are "just" because law makes them so. Thus, in order to make plunder appear just and sacred to many consciences, it is only necessary for the law to decree and sanction it. . . .

Law is justice. And it is under the law of justice — under the reign of right; under the influence of liberty, safety, stability, and responsibility — that every person will attain his real worth and the true dignity of his being. It is only under this law of justice that mankind will achieve — slowly no doubt, but certainly — God's design for the orderly and peaceful progress of humanity.

It seems to me that this is theoretically right, for whatever the question under discussion — whether religious, philosophical, political, or economic; whether it concerns prosperity, morality, equality, right, justice, progress, responsibility, cooperation, property, labor, trade, capital, wages, taxes, population, finance, or government — at whatever point on the scientific horizon I begin my researches, I invariably reach this one conclusion: The solution to the problems of human relationships is to be found in liberty. ♦

Frederic Bastiat's *The Law*, translated by Dean Russell, is available from the Foundation for Economic Education, Irvington-on-Hudson, New York, 10533. \$1.00 paper; \$1.75 cloth; quantity rates on request.

# The Moral Equivalent of Power

JOHN A. HOWARD



SOME twenty-five years ago a man died and bequeathed a small fortune to be spent in helping the people of other nations to understand the American way of life. The agents chosen to administer the funds were bright, conscientious folk and they went to work to carry out the intentions of the deceased. The task sounds simple enough when it goes by the first time, but it is an elusive object when one tries to apprehend it. After all, what is the American way of life, and how can it be explained?

After many months of seeking advice from experts and weighing carefully one project after another, the executors concluded that the more elaborate or grandiose the plan, the less likely it was to fulfill the purpose. Ultimately, they de-

cided to make some movies about the everyday life of inconspicuous citizens, with the commentary available in many different languages.

The film followed a paper boy on his early morning route, and a milkman on his, as they left their deliveries on front porches and at apartment doors. A small town banker was shown at his desk discussing loans with farmers, and later, in his overalls, painting his front fence. There was a committee meeting of a service agency and some firemen playing baseball with the neighborhood kids.

Such scenes scarcely seem destined to make the blood boil with undying enthusiasm for the American way of life, but there are some messages here which you and I cannot read. We are blind to what we take for granted. We attach no special significance to

Dr. Howard is President of Rockford College, Rockford, Illinois. This is a condensation of his Convocation Address of September 21, 1966.