

NOTES from FEE

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The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc.
Irvington-on-Hudson, New York 10533 Tel. (914) 591-7230

When Wishes Become Rights

Federal deficits mount as the consequence of increasing claims against welfare programs of all kinds. This growth of government spending and intervention in 1983 leads me to review and repeat some ideas I offered on the subject in *The Freeman* of November 1964.

Reflect on the "backward" countries in the world; the "distressed areas" in the U.S.A.; the many individuals who are poverty stricken, lame, blind. Then add all the unfulfilled desires and yearnings of 235 million Americans, ranging from better food, housing, clothing, medicine, hospitals, mink coats, and automobiles to colonizing outer space. What a field for the would-be philanthropist if all these wants were within his power to fulfill!

Let us imagine that you have been offered a magic power to satisfy everyone's material wishes with no effort on your part. Suppose, for instance, that you had Aladdin's lamp and could call up a genie that would confer any good or service on anyone you might choose to help. If you could thus satisfy desires for material things with neither cost nor effort on the part of anyone, would you be willing to assume the role of Aladdin and bestow benefactions like manna from heaven?

Perhaps you are among the very few whose answer would be an emphatic "No!" There are those few who would immediately sense the consequences of such reckless "humanitarianism": no more farming; the closing of all factories and stores; trains and planes coming to a stop; students no longer studying; a heaven on earth—a

veritable Shangri-La! No more problems; all obstacles overcome for mankind! These few know that when there is no exercise and flexing of the faculties, atrophy follows as a matter of course and our species disappears—all because everyone is granted riches for nothing more than the wishing!

If this sort of magic were only half practiced, would the result still be bad? "Yes!" answered Benjamin Franklin. "If man could have Half his Wishes, he would double his Troubles." We may infer from this that if a man's objectives could be achieved for nothing more than wishes, no good would be served, deterioration would ensue. Struggle, earning one's spurs, conscious effort, calling on one's potentialities and bringing them into use are essential to survival—to say nothing of progress. This is crystal clear to a few. But not to the many!

A majority of Americans, today, would accept the magic lamp. For it is obvious that most persons who would gratify a wish *at the expense of others* would more readily do so *at no expense to others*. Such wishers are among us by the millions, all in pursuit of something for nothing—effortless wish gratification.

These many Americans have found their magic lamp in the Federal political apparatus, and what a genie! Aladdin's lamp evoked a genie of supernatural powers; but this modern genie is a composite of quite ordinary human beings and,