Clipping of Note

OCTOBER 17, 1949

"Why don't you propose something *constructive*?"

FROM time to time, readers of *analysis* urge upon me the espousal of some program they are pleased to call "constructive." Some say that reform of our monetary system is the one essential for a healthy economic, and therefore social, order; single taxers are convinced that all things evil will vanish with the shifting of the incidence of taxation from production to privilege; for the pacifists, the cure-all is the abolition of war. I have been urged to take up the cudgels for decentralization, while those who see in "world government" the hope for human happiness have tried to press me into their service. . . . Every one of the proposed reforms has something to commend it, while the sincerity of the proponents makes one wish that they might succeed. The fact remains, however, that the reform invariably rests its case on the good-will, intelligence and selflessness of men who, invested with the power to do so, will put the reform into operation. And the lesson of history is that power is never so used. Never. I am convinced, on the other hand, that all of the evils of which these honest people complain can be traced to the misuse of power, and am therefore inclined to distrust political power of any kind. . . . The only "constructive" idea that I can in all conscience advance, then, is that the individual put his trust in himself, not in power; that he seek to better his understanding and lift his values to a higher and still higher level; that he assume responsibility for his behavior and not shift his responsibility to committees, organizations and, above all, a superpersonal State. Such reforms as are necessary will come of themselves when, or if, men act as intelligent and responsible human beings. There cannot be a "good" society until there are "good" men.

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