

It isn't the quantity of law and regulation which determines whether a state of anarchy exists. It is the quality of the law. If there were no law but this, *I will not rob another man of his property nor control what he does with it*—and if that law were written on all men's hearts, it wouldn't have to be in a book, and we would need very little else as a legal framework on which to build a truly "great society."

No, Bastiat cannot be called an anarchist—either of the so-called far left or the so-called far right. He believed in strong governmental protection of life, liberty, and property. He believed in strong voluntary adherence to God's law and natural law. And he believed in strong protection of the natural rights of all men when those rights were endangered by the lawless who sought to live by plunder—legal or illegal.

Let's Be Constructive

A third adverse criticism of *The Law* followed a common cliché of our times: "He is good at criticism; but he offers no solution to the problem." Many think that, if they can label a man as one who has offered no solution, they have destroyed the value of his criticism. They demand that there be some kind of a state plan for agriculture, education, and so on.

In economic matters, the best plan is to have no master plan. Leonard Read has explained this in *Anything That's Peaceful*, chapter twelve, "The Most Important Discovery in Economics." He sums it up in a sentence: "*Let the payment for each individual's contribution be determined by what others will offer in willing exchange.*"¹ In essence, this is the plan that Bastiat offered. It not only is a brave idea, but it is so foreign to the thinking of those who deem the state the instigator of all good action and the provider of all goods and services that they may miss the point entirely.

From one young man's paper, I got the impression that he visualized the government as a sort of flexible undergirding, an air mattress under the body-politic. But unlike the usual air mattress, in this case instead of the air departing to areas of less pressure when you walk on it, it would rush to the spot where you place your foot and hold you on an even plane with the rest of the mattress. Thus, when some part of society fails to

¹ Leonard E. Read, *Anything That's Peaceful* (Irvington-on-Hudson, N. Y.: Foundation for Economic Education, 1964), p. 154. I consider this book a logical sequel to *The Law*. It answers all objections to *The Law* raised by my students and gives a more complete and up-to-date rationale for the principles of liberty.

produce the contribution expected, the government will step in and take care of the deficit. The student applied this principle especially in schooling. He was sure that if the government were not there to keep things going, there would be no education. He agreed that it would be well if this could be done without the government, but thought there must be a powerful government waiting to rush in to prevent civilization from crumbling when "society" fails.

Fixing the Responsibility

A fourth criticism of *The Law* was a variant of the third. One student said that Bastiat failed to make anyone responsible for education. This presumes that education is something that is given, not received or sought for, and that it must be formal to be effective. It also presumes that you can educate someone against his will, that you can educate the uneducable, and that passing from one grade to another is education.

There is a natural responsibility for education. The responsibility lies in part with the man and wife who brought the child into the world. They can enter into voluntary relationships with like-minded people to take care of part of this responsibility. Since all education is religious education no matter what the field or what you

try to do with it, it follows that religious societies are a natural focal point for parents to unite in the education of their children.

The greatest responsibility for education lies with the individual himself. As he emerges into more and more of an independent personality and agent, he must assume this responsibility. In fact, he *does* assume it no matter what the state or his parents may try to do to prevent it. All they accomplish is a wasteful frustration of his will and productive capacity when they try to force their will upon him.

Only one student of 105 bewailed Bastiat's failure to fix the responsibility for education, while scores noticed that he had the ideal solution to the problem. Especially did they quote and enlarge upon his statement to the effect that the socialists accuse us of being against education simply because we are opposed to education based upon legal plunder.

Propaganda

A fifth adverse comment criticized *The Law* as being propaganda. This boy defined propaganda as something which is written to generate action. If one agrees with that definition and with the student's further assumption that all propaganda is evil, then *The Law* is what he concluded it was,