



"We're paying for it, so we might as well get our share."

THIS IS HOW many otherwise responsible citizens rationalize their own line-up at the federal trough. Farmers see businessmen getting their tariffs. Businessmen observe subsidies to farmers. Labor leaders eye them both for copying. Angelenos see the Gothamites getting federal aid, and Miamians read about federal handouts to Seattleites. Such logrolling of special interests grows, and "how to get ours" becomes the "economic" talk of the nation. That a naughty feeling often attends this weak excuse is understandable.

For obvious reasons, this bromide evokes no sense of guilt in Socialists—those who would communize society; federal handouts fit perfectly into their design of substituting government control for personal responsibility. The feelings of remorse are confined to individuals who think of themselves as conservative or libertarian. Unable clearly to diagnose their inconsistency, they at least suspect themselves of being Janus-faced.

To bring this political picture into focus, let's substitute one man for the majority, and a few for the millions, otherwise sticking to an accurate matching in structure. A man—call him Robin Hood—aspires to the role of God. He observes that the people in his shire come out unequally when freely exchanging the things they grow, the stock they raise, the items they make. Some fare a lot better than others. It never occurs to this Caesar of the countryside that dullness, laziness, indolence—as against ingenuity, initiative, industry—play a hand in these discrepancies. He sees only the inequalities and, in egotistical disdain, only his system for erasing them.

So, bow in hand, our self-appointed hero takes the produce from all unto himself. He'll dole it out as *he* sees the need. "Social justice" of *his* variety will be served!

The Socialists in the shire—those who believe in the communalization of the product of all by

coercion—may well be expected to hail this man and his tools of force.

But, what are we to think of those who have a libertarian bent, of those who pay lip service to the free society, and then go on to assert, "We're paying for it, so we might as well get our share." What sincerity or depth can be ascribed to their lip service? Do not actions speak louder than words? By their actions, are they not, most effectively, giving support to the socialistic design? Endorsing the Welfare State? Upholding Caesarism?

Frederic Bastiat, more than a century ago, referred quite accurately to the above behavior as *legal plunder*, and explained in simple terms how to identify it:

See if the law takes from some persons what belongs to them, and gives it to other persons to whom it does not belong. See if the law benefits one citizen at the expense of another by doing what the citizen himself cannot do without committing a crime.¹

No individual with libertarian pretensions can, in good conscience, advocate legal plunder. What, then, should be his position? He has only one way to turn. Bastiat, the libertarian teacher, was again helpful: "*Then abolish this law without delay, for it is not only an evil itself, but also it is a fertile source for further evils because it invites reprisals. If such a law—which may be an isolated case—is not abolished immediately, it will spread, multiply, and develop into a system.*"

Today, in the U.S.A., such law is not the isolated exception. It is already "a system." This system of plunder derives much of its support from individuals who do not subscribe to socialism but who say, "We're paying for it, so we might as well get our share."

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¹See *The Law* by Frederic Bastiat. Foundation for Economic Education, Irvington, N. Y. 76 pages, \$1.00 paper; \$1.75 cloth.

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