

SOCIETY WITHOUT GOVERNMENT

Men live by myths and the twentieth century American is no exception. From birth to death, most men live believing in concepts which even the most cursory examination should have shown to be nonsense. For centuries men believed that the earth was flat, that mysterious gods made the winds blow and tides rise. To this day, most men believe that government is a necessary condition for social peace.

Government is a monopolistic social authority which attempts to control the actions of persons in its domain by the use and threat of force. In other words, government is simply a formal and enduring association of persons (like a business or church) which has institutionalized *coercion* in society.

Government: Rationalization for Aggression

Despite the fact that governments, like all other social institutions, are nothing but a collection of individuals, universally governments are endowed by their members with a special power, authority of action, and exemption from moral rules not possessed by the individuals composing them when they act as private citizens. Thus we continually hear people speak of "the needs of society", "race pride", or "national purpose" as if these abstractions of society, race and nation were themselves goal-directed and conscious beings.

As a consequence of this common, but sociologically deadly, process, acts which would be considered the gravest crimes when committed privately are not only tolerated and sanctioned, but moreover exalted as noble and inspiring when committed in the name of the state.

Thus when an individual forcibly takes \$1,000 from another without his consent, we call it theft, but when a tax collector does the exact same thing it is called "due process of law". Similarly, when a private citizen takes it into his head to kill a hundred innocent persons in the United States we call it mass murder, but when another man, wearing the uniform of the national military, does the exact same thing to a hundred innocent peasants in Vietnam, it is called "defending the national interest."

But how people label their acts does not change their moral nature. Theft is theft, whether committed by an individual acting for his own benefit and on his own authority; or whether it is committed by a person acting in the name of the public for the supposed benefit of others, with the sanction of a million other people. Murder is murder whether it is committed by a private citizen in the United States or by a soldier in Vietnam.

Policemen, presidents, judges, tax collectors and soldiers are simply individuals, like you and me, and the same moral principles which apply to us apply to them also.

Whenever government officials violate the right of individual's to their own life, liberty and property; whenever the representatives of government *initiate force* to achieve their ends, they then become aggressors, plain and simple. Rationally one should regard and deal with the coercive agents of government no differently than one regards and deals with common criminals. If the latter properly merit our scorn and active resistance to their crimes, then so do the former.

In principle, there is no act which is immoral for the individual which is moral for the group. The only difference between such government aggressions as *taxation* (legalized theft), *conscription* (legalized slavery), and *war* (legalized murder) and private crimes is that those governmental aggressions have existed for so long and are so common in human society that people regard them as inevitable, necessary and even beneficial—an incredible inversion of reason and morality.

Government: The Master Criminal

Far from being defenders of human rights, modern governments are their greatest enemies. Modern governments have not eliminated crime, but have merely *institutionalized it* . . . meaning that they conduct their crimes in an orderly, systematic fashion and with elaborate pretensions of "noble purposes". For sheer magnitude of murder, theft and fraud, modern governments have no peer. They are the master criminals, the scoundrels *par excellence*, of the modern world.

It is well known that authoritarian governments, such as those of Nazi Germany, Communist China and Soviet Russia, are murderers, each responsible for the death of millions of innocent men, women and children through their various pogroms. However, the welfare states of modern Europe and America differ from these killer regimes only in *degree* and not in *kind*.

In the Vietnam War, for example, over 50,000 Americans were killed, and hundreds of thousands of others were subjected to involuntary servitude for a meaningless crusade. Those Americans fortunate enough to escape such complete, if temporary slavery, are still partially enslaved by taxes (income, excise and inflation) which now take 45% of the average person's income. The typical American, in other words, now works nearly half of his time for the purposes of the state rather than for his own ends.

And everywhere in America, in the name of "law and order", the police and bureaucrats enforce the *five million* arbitrary, incomprehensible and contradictory laws of the American welfare state. In 1976 alone over *four million* Americans, a number greater than the entire population of Denmark, were arrested for such victimless crimes as gambling,

homosexuality, drunkenness, statutory rape (the age of consent is as high as 22 in some states), and the use of proscribed drugs.

Beyond the Coercive State

Regardless of what one thinks government *should do*, the reality is that the present United States government is the greatest criminal organization in the land, practicing more theft, murder and fraud than any combination of private criminals and gangs could conceivably get away with. It is only the elaborate social mystique with which government is cloaked that enables such a level of institutionalized crime to persist.

If one truly wishes to defend human rights, it is clear that the abolition of *the present government*, and all of its attendant aggressions, is mandatory.

However it is not just particular acts of particular governments which are immoral. The institution of government itself is immoral. Government is conceived in force (e.g., conquest, expropriation, subjugation), sustained by violence (e.g., taxation, regulation and war), and defined by prohibition.

Just as there is nothing which is immoral for the individual which is moral for the group, similarly **there is nothing which is moral for the group which is immoral for the individual.** If it is moral for governments to arrest actual aggressors, to investigate murders, to try and punish malefactors, and to defend society against foreign aggressors, then it is also moral for private individuals and their voluntary associations to do the exact same thing.

But is it practical?

Absolutely. Institutionalized coercion — the essence of government — does not endow men and their societies with any special *positive* attributes which they do not already possess. Every police department, every school, every court and every army is paid for *privately*; that is, by funds generated through private production and enterprise. Government *produces* nothing; it merely *redistributes* that which others have produced. Thus it is absurd to assert "No one could afford to pay for schools, or police, or roads, or military defense without government." The fact is that *you* can afford to pay for them because you already are paying for them.

Social Services Without Government

But how could funds for social services be collected without taxes and how could such services be organized without government force? — The same way in which every non-aggressive business is financed and organized today: In the form of profit-making businesses organized in response to consumer demand.

Because people desire and need such services as education, police protection and military defense, these services would exist in a society without govern-

ment. However, they would be far more responsive to consumer demand and far more efficient since inefficient enterprises would go out of business rather than be subsidized or protected from competition by the state.

In a free society, the form and services of each business would be responsive to consumer demand and there would be as many varieties of services as there were interest groups and markets. Thus police protection would be available through insurance-type contracts of varying prices and extent. Persons concerned about burglary and attacks upon their persons could buy those services and no others. Rich persons concerned about kidnapping would pay for extra protection from that aggression. And the poor could buy the "special budget package" or organize neighborhood patrols — which in a free society could be armed with guns. Best of all, police would not spend 2/3 of their time persecuting homosexuals and prostitutes as they do today.

In the case of some social services, such as military defense, the unit of service would be appreciably larger than an individual. Thus multinationals would hire mercenary armies to protect their corporate holdings. Shippers and other common carriers would rent escort service. Freight carriers would arm their vehicles with guns and missiles. Businessmen's associations would buy anti-missiles, missile-eating lasers and other protective devices for their property. And the many anti-totalitarian groups in a free society would organize to assassinate enemy leaders who threatened invasion and sabotage their weapons on the ground. Each social group would purchase that amount and form of military protection it perceived as being in its interest to have.

Free men defend that which they value and no one has a right to force them to defend that which they do not value.

Social Stability of the Stateless Society

What would prevent private defense agencies from violating human rights, fighting among themselves or using their power to dominate society?

The same thing which prevents (or enables) governments from doing it today: The morality and courage of the people in a society. However, in several very important respects, private defense agencies would be far less able than governments to violate individual rights. As mentioned previously, governments have a vast mythology enshrouding them and enabling them to get away with their crimes. Since a market agency of defense would be clearly a business, it would have a very difficult time getting men to worship it as they do government. (When is the last time you felt patriotic toward Perpetual Insurance Company?) Further, since there

would be many different defense agencies in a free society, a company engaging in aggressions in a society of predominantly moral men would lose business to more moral companies. Today if the government violates your rights, you have no recourse. In a free society, if one defense agency insisted upon violating your rights, you could sue them, or hire another defense agency.

What then would prevent defense agencies from fighting among themselves, from freedom degenerating into true chaos? In the first place true *defense agencies* would not *aggress*, so there would be no need for retaliation. Further, to the extent that the defense agencies of a free society were truly concerned with justice, it would simply be to their mutual interest to cooperate in the minimization of aggression. Disputes *between* justice agencies would be handled in courts, just as they are today — far less costly and dangerous than declaring war every time there is a minor legal disagreement. Similarity of procedural rules for dealing with aggressions would be encouraged by common law reviews and the adherence of men to the *minimal* common system of ethics embodied in the **non-aggression principle** (non-aggression toward non-aggressors) — a necessary precondition for *any* peaceful society.

In the absence of the centralization of power which government creates, dominance of society by one group is far more difficult. But in this, as in all other aspects of society, there can be no absolute guarantee. Eternal vigilance is always the price of liberty.

Society Without Government

The alternative to the artificial, coercive order of government is simply the natural, peaceful community of free men cooperating for their own ends, according to their own chosen means.

Statism does not work in producing food for the Soviet Union, in ensuring peace in Ireland, or in running the U.S. school system. It is a delusion to think that it works any better in 'providing justice or ensuring the domestic tranquility.'

The alternative to government collectivism is, in a word, *freedom*. A free society would be far from perfect, and not entirely free from conflict. However, it would be free from the most destructive and pervasive of all scourges: institutionalized violence.

By discarding the mythology of the state and all of its attendant evils, mankind would take a giant step forward toward mature human civilization: **society without government.**

Get a complete set of all 45 SIL issue papers for only \$2! Order from: SIL, PO Box 1147, Warminster, PA 18974.

SOCIETY WITHOUT GOVERNMENT

JARRET B. WOLLSTEIN



SOCIETY FOR INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY