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The Simple Life

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From the government which is seeking ways of getting more taxation and the business man who is wondering how he is going to pay his taxes down to the unemployed who wonder what they are going to do if no taxation is raised to provide them with food, raiment and shelter—everybody is interested in the problem of taxation.

Taxation has become intolerable because governments have exceeded their functions. I am going to prescribe as the remedy a return to the simplest form of government that we can return to.

FUNCTION OF GOVERNMENT

What is the function of government? The best definition of government I find in the Declaration of Independence. It says a man is born with certain rights—the rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Particularly mark the words, "pursuit of happiness." The Declaration does not say, life, liberty and the free gift of happiness, but life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

What are the proper functions of government under the definition that it shall ensure the right of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness?

A government must protect the state from aggression without. It must undertake the duty of national defence. It must protect the representatives of law and order from all who oppose law within the state. It must assume the duty of police. It must set up an organization for the punishment of every infraction of the basic social code.

That is to say, it must set up the mechanism of criminal justice. It must provide for the settlement of issues between individuals in order that they may not resort to club law, and they must appoint an organization for the administration of civil justice.

PROTECT SHIPPING, HEALTH

It must in assurance of the right of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness ensure communication. That is to say, it must protect shipping.

It must take care of public health in order to prevent such epidemics as ravaged the Old World in the Middle Ages.

And here we begin to verge upon Socialism.

It must take care of the poor which we have always with us. Finally, in order to do all these things, it must set up the mechanism of taxation.

Because we have exceeded the functions of government; because we have asked governments to do what we should do; because we have delegated the duties which we should undertake; because, in short, we are gradually, more and more, depending upon the somebody else to do our job, the burden of taxation has risen to its present intolerably great weight.

I am not talking about the result of a calamity just now. There was, during the war, enormous expansion and possibly, if investigations were complete, intolerable waste brought about by the way in which we did the organizing. We have to face that. We have also to face, as result of this calamity, another calamity, the calamity of unemployment. When you are dealing with a calamitous situation all ordinary rules go by the board. The Federal Government must keep the bulk of the people who, through no fault of their own, are in straitened circumstances—must give them a leg up although, strictly speaking, it does not come within its functions. I am not, therefore, going to discuss the situation created by the war or the situation created by unemployment. I am going to deal with the situation created by fifty years of folly.

FAIRY GODFATHER ROLE

Government has assumed under pressure of everybody the role of fairy godfather. There is a process whereby you bribe or purchase political support with public money. In the olden days, if a man purchased a constituency in England he paid so many guineas for a vote. He bought the constituency with his own money. If discovered, he might be put out of his seat on account of corrupt practice. To-day in England and, to a certain extent, everywhere else, a man nurses a constituency, gives it a golf links or a football field and hopes when election comes it will be remembered. He is buying support with his own money. But we have such an unalert electorate in this country that politicians actually go to voters and buy them with their own money. The result is penury in the public accounts. In such departments as the Public Works Department, if we had the money spent on unnecessary wharves and post-offices which are prematurely built where the building then existing was plenty good enough to be of service, I think it would compare with the national debt. People go up the back stair, or put on the mask of public service and obtain by the front stair, subsidies and grants of all descriptions. If their enterprise is a success they get the profits; if it is a failure, we have paid for it.

BANKING BY GOVERNMENT

We have been going into the business of accommodation. We have become endorsers. Almost any man who can persuade the community that he has enterprise which ultimately would redound to the public benefit can get us to endorse his bond. If his enterprise succeeds he grows rich; if it fails we are left holding the bag. I think we have one apposite example in our railway history.

The government has been going into business. If there is one thing the government should not do it is to go into business. It is not fair.

If you were to take the Department of Agriculture and find out what it costs you would be staggered. We have

experimental farms all over the country and no prize grain has come from them. A private individual has developed the best grain we have to-day. There are countless bureaux. All the good they do should, in my opinion, be paid for by the people whom they serve and not by the community at large. You have ten departments of agriculture, one for each of the provinces and one for the Dominion. If there is one thing that should not be subject to political interference it is agriculture.

It might be possible, in the case of the Department of Agriculture, to spread over a period of years, the absorption by the Federal of the provincial departments. In that way we could save millions of dollars.

COMMISSION GOVERNMENT

I am coming to the latest thing which government has been doing, one which will absorb more and more of our money. I am talking about the growth of commission governments.

These are Federal Commissions. The Railway Commission which costs us annually \$366,698; the International Joint Commission which costs \$49,635; the Civil Service Commission which costs us \$278,667; the International Fisheries Commission costing \$36,654; the Federal District Commission, \$200,000; the War Graves and Battlefield Commission, \$82,057. I have nothing against any self-supporting commission. For instance, although I believe the liquor traffic is better organized and more highly controlled in Great Britain than it is here under commissions, I would endure a commission which is self-supporting.

Commissions have only three possible functions. Either they administer or they enquire or they adjudicate. All right. If they merely administer then it is side-stepping by the government of its duties. An enquiry commission enquires into a state of affairs in order to shape a policy. If it is this, then it has usurped the function which, in the glorious days of restricted government, used to be done by parliament itself.

Finally, a commission could be called upon to adjudicate.

But if there is an issue, it should be decided in the courts. There is nothing in the way of adjudication which the Railway Commission does, which the International Joint Commission does, which the Civil Service Commission does, which could not be better, more fairly and more decently dealt with by the courts.

FATE OF ROMAN EMPIRE

We should, by some means or other, bring public opinion about that will cause us to revert back to government by government alone. Unless we do that we have to undo gradually what has been done during the last fifty years or proceed toward complete Socialism when the government will do everything and we will enlist under it like soldiers with a guarantee of rations, shelter and clothing.

What has been may reoccur. Lavissee and Rombeau's analysis of the main cause of the collapse of the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire collapsed under taxation and it collapsed under officialdom. There were so many officials and so much taxation that trade, commerce, industry and agriculture all fell into ruin and the burden of taxation all this time had become so heavy that those who could still pay taxes or were called upon to pay taxes gave up their lands, gave up their houses and went to the city and were ultimately reduced to the rank of slaves. If you think the Romans were not adepts at taxation you are mistaken. There were land taxes, poll taxes, taxes on industry, succession taxes, sales taxes and customs taxes.

TOP HEAVY AND DANGEROUS

Speaking of the top-heavy administration of the Roman Empire with its officials, great and small, each with his own budget, offices, office staff and administration expense, Lavissee and Rombeau go on to say of this administration: "It is dangerous because it is perfect in theory, touching everything that can be touched; because it facilitates the execution of the will of the governing authority, and so weighs more and more upon the individual liberty of the subject; because it creates the redoubtable tyranny of habit

which is officially called routine; because it allows only one initiative to exist, that of government, and by its own inertia paralyzes that initiative. It is dangerous in any event, but particularly where it has no counterpoise; where the subject has against an irresponsible functionary no appeal except to another functionary equally irresponsible. It can be demonstrated," they go on to say, "that under such administration the social structure of the Roman Empire collapsed and fell into ruin."

The world is standing in exactly the same position that the Roman world stood. The problem is the same. We have taxation, cessation of trade and commerce. We have governments, one after another throwing up their hands. You have people leaving the paid ranks day after day and not knowing where their next breakfast is coming from. These are things that must be remedied. You must either go to the extreme left of Socialism or you must go back to the medium right of the saner, independent method of government which the British alone developed and which they alone can keep.