

"Those Who Share With Thieves"

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This heading is a quotation, not just a nasty attack. It is quoted from the *Machzor*, the Jewish praybook for the Days of Repentance and it is listed there naming one group of people amongst others who cannot repent. The same *Machzor* is studded with quotations from leftist statesmen and women and with their ideology. Repentance means, to a Jew in particular, to stop making the same old mistakes all over again. So far, few of us have done so where socialist statism is concerned. If fellow-libertarians should think that I am using *Free Life* to let off steam, they are absolutely right. But there are some items that I hope will interest them yet: a Jew is supposed to be working for the *Messianic Age* and among other things this age will be one where "each man shall sit under *his* figtree and palmtree and no-one will terrorize him." And be it your figtree, your appletree or your parasol you are sitting under, this is exactly what libertarians are working for: To give each human being the right to own and enjoy property unharassed. Or in other words: To give him peace and freedom. I am saying this: We should have allies in Judaism and we don't very often. But why not? Could it be, that somehow my people have involved themselves too much in a specific mode of sharing with thieves to repent? Free-market policies are often condemned among Jews. People who follow these are seen as merciless, unfeeling and at odds with nature. Socialism is seen as consistent with the Jewish principle of charity. I say this isn't so. I say that free-marketeers have every chance to make a better life for others as well as themselves - to love their neighbours as themselves - and that socialism not only robs people of their money but also of that chance. That's what this essay is all about. And now that I have told you how I have come to write it. let me proceed.

Them and Us

The claim that the seizure of other people's property that calls itself "taxation" isn't theft is not really such a tall call - as compared to, say, the claim that $1+1+1 = 1$ or that strawberries are elephants in disguise. Come to think of it - it really isn't theft. The state doesn't just seize your property it also threatens to kidnap you if you don't give it up. That's extortion. Yet, there are many people who condone this. Most Libertarians are sober enough not to bother too much about those who proclaim that we are "fascists" because we dislike the state so much, but it does bother us a little if people contend that we "do not care about anyone but ourselves."

We care about ourselves, that is true. We want to be given the right to build our own lives and pursue what we consider our personal happiness. We also care about others. We want them to have these rights too. We care about others: We do not believe that we have any right to any of their assets under any circumstances if they are not under some form of contract to us which grants us such rights. Should they be willing to help us anyway, we will gratefully accept. We also care about ourselves for we demand that others respect our property in the same way. And as we are pleased to accept help, many of us are eager to help out where we can.

A False Perception of the World

But some people want more - a lot more. They are not content themselves to give, they believe that they must force others to give too. How does their system compare to ours? We should not generalise too much here, some of those people are decent and sincere. For example, some misunderstand Darwin and believe that it is the natural state of affairs for the group to take preference over the individual. Whatever you may assume about how the world came into existence if they are right then we would have to live with that. For it is very hard to see how a species could change its basic genetic make-up without tuning into a different species. But nature doesn't work like that. No, they

have got it absolutely wrong. What takes preference in nature is not the group nor the individual person but the individual unit of inheritable information - the gene. If it is good for the gene the individual will be compelled to run with the group, or to use the group, or to kill the others, or to die himself. And whoever is tempted to break into moral abhorrence now has got it wrong again. Nature by itself is value-free. It always offers the possibility for good or bad and a conscious mind must choose. Yes, must - not can. There is no such thing as value-freeness in our actions, for unlike nature we are aware of our acts and their results. If you would claim that the individual must naturally give up his interests for the common good you are defying evolution. That doesn't sound like a successful venture.

The Victims

Nevertheless, we are conscious beings and we could always claim that the whole of this genetic programme, however well it has worked in the past, is the dark side of nature and that our rational mind is the good side. As I have been told from time to time *"We are free to use our rational mind to overcome our natural selfishness and so we could yet impose the society that aims at the welfare of the many."* Look at the first part of that sentence *"... to overcome our natural selfishness"* - how? But then that is something that everybody knows, isn't it? We just have to give up some of our wealth and our opportunities and redistribute them so that the less well off can share in our good fortune. So where's the problem? Look at it a little closer. Let us take one concrete example out of the many - let us look at child-benefit and related benefits such as "free" education: to start with there is a certain amount of money available that people might or might not spend on having children. That money is distributed such that some people have a lot of it, most have some and some have not enough. One thing redistribution will not do is increase the actual amount of money available. If nothing else happened but that the money was redistributed, the population as a whole could still afford to have the same number of children as before - this would not be true for the individual couples though. So while some

might now be able to have a child that they otherwise could not afford, others will have to have that child less. Yes! The cost of child benefit to some people is not counted just in a certain amount of money they might lose, it is the life of their child that otherwise could have been. Furthermore, I advisedly use the phrase "if nothing else happened" above, for something else does happen: Redistribution needs bureaucracy and bureaucracy costs money so that the lives of a few more children that might have been are lost some place in the welfare offices.

Similar things can be said for people who are suffering in the NHS queues in the face of first class medical services that are considerably cheaper but unaffordable to them; not because they couldn't earn the money but because they have been ripped off in the name of welfare. Redistribution cannot possibly improve the overall situation. What can give others a chance is a market into which any person can enter and where he can compete unhindered.

The Users

That however would strike very many people as being just that heart-of-stone business person's attitude that they detest so much. Let us put aside the fact, that to give charitably people must have acquired something they can afford to give first, and that charity too is a feature of the free market, for it is a voluntary act. Let us assume for a moment that we are heart-of-stone business people. Let us also assume that we have free choice of the kind of society we would like to have for ourselves. Would we really choose the free market? Hardly! In choosing that we choose competition. In a free market we are faced with the uncomfortable fact that every Tom, Dick and Harry can open up a business just like ours and that business might offer better goods at more competitive prices, which means we would have to make an effort to catch up with them or we are the losers. More uncomfortable for us, the competition might offer better working conditions and better pay and therefore attract the better workforce, so that we will have to do the same or we are stuck with inefficiency and poor quality of work. Anyway, consider the labour market even now, where there is just a

tiny bit more freedom: There is an increasing number of shopwindows with a sign saying that the company needs staff and there are otherwise promising branches of diverse businesses that have to close because they can't get staff at all. A free market spells full employment and that's no good for exploiters of the workforce - no good at all! So first of all we will have to choose a system that makes sure that there won't be any competition; we want a monopoly or at least a safe cartel, right? Everybody will have to buy from us and whoever works in the branch will have to work for us. We do not have to bother too much about the quality of our goods nor the conditions of the employees. Nor need we "exploit" the employees - that only spells trouble. It is much safer to exploit the customers instead. We can let the employees strike and we will pay them virtually any sum they want, for to prevent our profit from going down we'll just have to put our expenses on the price tags of our goods.

The World-wide Prison

We are faced with one slight problem though: however much people might need our goods, over-pricing is a well-known means for creating a glut and that's no good. at least not when it is you who is sitting on it. But I have an idea: why don't we just force people to pay for our goods whether they want them, need them or detest them? We will find ourselves some agency that will go round collecting the money for us, never mind by what means, and then we can just receive our share and all we have to do is make sure that nobody else starts doing the job we are not doing. One more thing to do: let us make sure that our customers are not going to leave us altogether. There are two possible ways: we can see that they can't get out. That might cause some trouble, for there is a chance that they won't like it - but if there are many arrangements like ours, we'll be in luck: as we have ousted competition jobs will be in short supply everywhere and that will make sure that nobody will get in anywhere else. Then we would tell our own people that we are protecting them from foreigners taking their jobs, and the others will tell their people the same, and as we have cut back work opportunities so

drastically I think they will probably fall for that, and thus we can live in comfort.

An Unstable Situation

Sounds familiar, doesn't it? Can you point to any form of controlled economy that has not produced this situation in a relatively short period of time? But why should that be so?

It has to do with the basic biology mentioned at the start of this essay. An "unselfish society" is what is known as an "evolutionarily unstable situation": if we should manage to create one then it only needs a few selfish people to infiltrate it and use it. And that is exactly what happens. It is obviously much more comfortable to live out of someone else's pocket than to struggle to fill your own. Any system that will give some people money and power is prone to such abuse; not just by top-notch politicians - it can equally be abused on a lower level. For example - to return for a moment to the child-benefit story - it is not quite unknown for certain people to have children to reap the financial benefits and most of all the benefit of better, bigger housing. If you think you can imagine how some such people will care for their offspring ask the NSPCC. Few people have such vivid fantasies as to imagine real life horrors (which is not to say that these are all or the only child-abusers). Observe here that we have also been landed with the situation where surrogate motherhood for money is illegal. In other words: It is illegal to take money for creating a life that is much wanted and desired but it is legal to create a life for money and other benefits. that will then exist as an unwanted side-effect of, say, a nice council-flat.

Far from overcoming natural selfishness, redistribution of assets simply opens the door to a particularly nasty form of exploitation, one that in some cases is being forced on the exploiter, namely in the case of those people who have been reduced to that position through the state taking away their assets. The bulk of taxes comes from lower to middle incomes and the state is not just taking money, but also destroying job-opportunities.

Freedom Builds - Controls Demolish

Are we libertarians the goodies then, those who have overcome natural selfishness? I wouldn't believe that for a minute! We libertarians are just people like all the others - although with a little more sense of reality perhaps.

It's time to ask a question now: why should we overcome natural selfishness? As far as we know it has worked since life began, for it is one of the driving forces behind evolution. It is still going strong wherever it is allowed to work, and the market itself works because it obeys the laws of evolution: the most successful systems and techniques win out. Everyone who competes in the market constantly strives to improve his techniques in an act of plain selfishness that benefits everybody else. The selfishness we are concerned with them is the selfishness of life to keep on living.

It is not true that there is no room for love, justice or a sense of beauty in this. Love, justice and a sense of beauty can be very helpful when it comes to supporting life. There are, of course, people who love other animals, plants or a little piece of yellow metal with a glittering stone on it more than humans. There will be people who do lack a sense of justice or whose sense of beauty is destructive. Such people might then spend a fortune on wildlife, accumulate a treasure, land in jail or die an early death. Perhaps we don't like the way they spend their money. they might be a danger to themselves or even to other individuals, but they will never be a danger to mankind as a whole - *unless they can force their tastes on others*. That has been done lately. We have arrived at a situation, where African Governments are bribed at our expense into feeding zebras in the face of starving children. A sense of justice has been reinterpreted - by the all-too-popular R. C. Jung - as the symbol of a criminal mind. State legislation often reflects this in rejecting just punishment as deplorable revenge and thereby abolishing the only workable deterrent of crime. Beauty is no longer in the eye of the beholder but in the hands of diverse pressure groups. which will make every possible attempt to take the future away from mankind and give it to

cities full of derelict buildings. That's not in the interest of anyone.

Deadly to Some

Or is it? Besides those who use the system to provide for themselves there are always those who will try to use the system to get rid of the competition. Some academics, for example, who do not want to give up their privileges are well aware that in a free-market society a comfortable standard of living loses its exclusiveness and has to be shared with the masses. (Petr Beckmann realizes this in another context in his book *The Health Hazards of Not Going Nuclear*) These are the people who find other people's poverty romantic and who usually do not hesitate to say so either - at least in some round-about manner. They might proclaim their abhorrence at romantic little fishing villages being destroyed by tourism, which gives the inhabitants a chance to provide for themselves and their families and the "commoners" a chance to stay in the same hotel as they do and to crowd the beach. That's another reason for sticking with a controlled economy. It is commonly known that "the natives" in such romantic underdeveloped places live in misery and die young. Ayn Rand once said that a man who kills for money stands morally higher than a man who kills for kicks. I agree.

Condemned to Fail

As stated above, redistribution cannot create wealth and it will certainly destroy some wealth in the process. That is a crucial point: after redistribution we are left with less. So, however much we may have produced meanwhile, part of it will have to be used to make up for that loss, and on the whole we are not as well off as we could be. Part of redistribution is however done in such a way, that it will actually force down production: minimum wages and social benefits burden companies and leave less money for investment. That is not exactly an incentive to create wealth, nor is it a way to secure jobs. And so less and less has to be redistributed among more and more people. Again, the situation is evolutionarily unstable: while there is something for the state to give away, there will be individuals for whom it is worthwhile to use that

opportunity. The point will be reached, however, where it is better for some people not to play the game. That time has come when the state runs into financial difficulties. There is less that the state can hand out to individuals, than what it is taking from them. Here's a reason why the welfare state must collapse sooner or later: at some point there is simply not enough left to redistribute so that any sizeable group of people could be kept happy. What is not certain by any means is whether that will happen soon enough for the population to be saved from starvation. Where it doesn't, we are faced with a so-called "third-world country" - and there is nothing to suggest that this could not come about right here in Europe.

Necessary Repairs

It might seem that Britain has escaped it. The state parasites are lamenting loudly, other people are bemoaning the inevitable withdrawal symptoms of the welfare state's departure. One example of this I have recently heard was the assertion that "government cuts had only created dangerous queues for places in old people's homes". We are not able to eliminate these queues right now, but once the welfare state had taken over we could not have prevented them in the long run anyway. To do that we would have needed a market which could have priced places in old-people's homes. This could assess the real demand and therefore we could build old people's homes as they are needed. It is easily imaginable that there can be an insurance that offers to supply its customers with a place in such a home, should they ever need it. In fact, there could be several such schemes on offer, just as with life-insurance for example. This would give people a choice and companies an incentive to offer decent services. If such a system was commonplace cases in which a person had not been provided for would be rare indeed. Even then it would be no problem for private charities to deal with these - and even there we might have some competition and a choice then. Right now we are not in such a happy situation. The damage the welfare state has caused can only be undone step by step. If we persist in introducing more and more freedom and hand over control to the only place that can handle it - the market -

we will at least be able to prevent the queues we have now to be repeated in the next generation, and the one after that and on and on. As for the state-parasites: these are the few that will be losing out to the welfare of the many. It is not that "*we are free to use our rational mind to overcome our natural selfishness and so we could yet impose the society that aims at the welfare of the many.*" This is not going to work. But there is a way that does: We are free to use our rational mind to overcome the parasitic side of our natural selfishness so that we can use the productive side of it which will naturally and automatically produce the society that achieves the welfare of the many.

Free Life