

## The Moral Issue in Taxation

Taxes are a forced contribution to the State from the individual. Inasmuch as they rest on force, they must be utterly just, or a great wrong ensues. Couple with this the accepted fact that what a man earns belongs to him, or he feels that it ought to belong to him, and we get a conflict of economics, ethics and politics, with disastrous results. Unless taxes are moral, they are not only unmoral; they are demoralising. And that is the present situation. Taxes are a demoralising force in the life of the nation to-day.

We need taxes to support Government. Admitted. But government at its best is a clumsy animal, an unwieldy pachyderm. And while we are ready to carry water and hay to the elephant for our tickets to the circus, we object to carrying it beyond a given point. We want to see the circus. When we are faced with the alternatives of drudgery, lying out of it, taking a licking, of fighting for our rights, why let's get together and fight, on paper at least. But who are we to throw a stone at the man caught in a lie. "Let him who is without sin, cast the first, etc."

And the sequel to that—"Go thou and sin no more." Just how can we go and *not* sin? That is a question, a moral issue in taxation. We have the eighth Commandment—"Thou shalt not steal." It should have a corollary—"Thou shalt not be stolen from." When we submit passively to being stolen from, we become a party to the crime. We are guilty with the thief. When we feel that taxes are stealing from us our earnings, and a good many of us feel that way, and most of our taxes are stealing, why, there must be something wrong with the system. Picking out a victim and stoning him won't do any good except to satisfy the Pharisees and the mob. The victim becomes a meaningless scape-goat, sacrificed to ignorance and passion and publicity.

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*This is a short excerpt from an article in Land & Liberty, August-September 1950. Mr. Brett lives in Detroit.*