

Justice, Expediency and Mr. Hopkins  
By Weld Carter / May 1943

*When Mr. Harry Hopkins, a gentleman of enormous influence and authority in national affairs, recently delivered himself of certain pronouncements affecting the life and welfare of every individual resident in this land of the free and home of the brave, WELD CARTER, New Jersey businessman and student and teacher of the philosophy of economic freedom, was moved to disagreement. In the following pithy paragraphs, Mr. Carter tells Freeman readers what he thinks of the 'musts' and 'must nots' laid down by Mr. Hopkins for the guidance of John Q. Citizen. We'll give you this tip in advance: he doesn't like 'em!*

\* THE OPENING ARTICLE in the Reader's Digest for February 1943 begins with a quotation:—"If this country ever gets a system of governmental regimentation . . ." and the second article is headed:

President Roosevelt's right-hand man graphically blueprints the near future of every American.

YOU WILL BE MOBILIZED by Harry Hopkins.

Thus the "if" on page 1 becomes a promise on page 7, a promise of as complete a regimentation as the fertile imagination of its author can conceive, a regimentation whose intensity will dwarf the controls already in effect and whose fulfillment will be achieved, not in some vague and roseate future, but definitely and promptly, in this present year of 1943.

The argument proper is in two parts: the first treats of justice; the second, of expediency. Both arguments are brief, taking up only a portion of the first page, the balance of the article portraying what the future holds for a regimented America.

"In fairness," Mr. Hopkins says, "to those men and women who will give everything, even their lives, to save our country, no American anywhere not now in the war effort, should be allowed to decide for himself how much he will do or how much he will give. Under government direction, with no pussyfooting, we must throw into the war effort every able-bodied man and woman."

Now justice, according to Montesquieu, is a relation of congruity which really subsists between two things; this relation is always the same, whatever being considers it,

whether it be God, or an angel, or lastly, a man. It is a relation of equality, and it is evidently this sense of the idea that served as the premise of Mr. Hopkins' argument — the notion that justice demands that all be treated alike.

Yet Mr. Hopkins' conclusion, that every able-bodied man and woman should be enslaved, is an obvious absurdity, for that would be to say that justice leads to slavery; whereas on every page of recorded history, in letters bold and clear, is written the unmistakable lesson that only in freedom can mankind find justice. Therefore there must be a flaw in the reasoning.

Under Selective Service, we have enslaved a portion of our population; but justice demands equality; therefore to serve the ends of justice, all must be enslaved; thus runs the argument. But to state it is to reveal the fallacy. For the idea of slavery of itself is incomplete. There can be no ruled unless there also be a ruler; there can be no slaves without a master. And between the master, on the one hand, and the slaves on the other, there can only exist a state of inequality and a consequent denial of justice. And the more the slaves and the fewer the masters, the greater the inequality, the grosser the injustice.

Thus when the light of freedom shone ever so briefly on the citizens of ancient Athens, it was — it is true — a very imperfect freedom, for it was founded on a slave class. But equality and justice were lessened, not heightened, when those erstwhile free denizens were debased toward the level of the serfs. Thus the transition from the status of free, independent Italian husbandmen to that of fawning Roman lackeys marked a shocking growth of disparity in Roman society and an attendant growth of injustice.

Had we, at the conclusion of the Civil War, moved to enslave every able-bodied man and woman "in fairness" to the negroes, that would not have constituted a step toward equality and justice but towards greater inequality and more injustice. And when Hitler adds the Greek people to the long list of others that he has enslaved, despite all his claims, he is making a mockery and perversion of equality and justice.

Whatever may have been the necessity, we have enslaved that portion of our people whom we have drafted for involuntary service with our armed forces, but equality and justice will not be promoted by enslaving every other "able-bodied man and woman." Equality and justice will be promoted only when we can release our conscripts from their bondage, just as equality and justice were promoted by freeing the negroes after

the civil war. So much for the moral aspect of Mr. Hopkins' plea. What sort of a case does he make for expediency?

“When,” he says, “through their chosen representatives the American people enact the laws that are necessary, we all shall be in the kind of work we should be doing.....Rationing and priorities .... will determine the kinds of food, clothing, housing and business which we shall have.”

What kind of work should we be doing? Should we all be doing the kind of work that will produce the greatest amount of wealth, the maximum fund of things to meet the needs, to satisfy the desires of the whole of society? If so, then the laws that are necessary are laws which will abolish all governmental regulations and restrictions which in any way impede trade or hinder production. For the result of governmental restrictions is in fact to restrict: they divert labor and capital from more, to less, profitable employments, and they thereby lessen the fund, as Adam Smith told us long ago, from which all revenues are drawn.

But obviously that isn't the kind of work Mr. Hopkins thinks we should be doing, because he says that no one “without good cause will leave a war job for one that pays more.” Nor are those the kind of laws that Mr. Hopkins thinks are “necessary,” for his “necessary” laws lead to rationing and priorities.

But if the expedient to be sought be not the natural one of maximum production, what then is the expedient and by what, or whose, standards is it to be judged?

In truth, of course, slavery is no more expedient than it is just. Greek civilization did not blossom when Athens turned its back on freedom; it withered and faded. Roman civilization was decaying directly as the Roman people's free status was changed to that of ward of the state. To the extent that we, even nominally, unshackled the negroes, we expanded our civilization in this country, just as, in direct consequence of the tyranny of Hitler, production is declining and civilization is vanishing from continental Europe.

Thus slavery doesn't even find its warrant in expediency. It isn't as though we had to pay a price for freedom, as though we could exchange freedom for a higher material standard of living, for more of the things we need to sustain us. It isn't as though it were a choice between freedom and expediency. It is that only through freedom can a true expediency be achieved.

Thus it is that considerations of expediency lead us to the same conclusion we reached through a consideration of justice, which of course must be, if the laws of the universe are harmonious — if the Lord our God is, indeed, a just God.

And what, the reader may ask, was the complete quotation on page 1 of the February Reader's Digest, which began with "If"? It was this: "If this country ever gets a system of governmental regimentation, labor will suffer most" Its author was William Green, President of the American Federation of Labor.