
On Doing Something About It

Every diagnostician is faced with the demand for a cure. Readers of *analysis* have found fault with its lack of a "constructive program" of some kind, of a proposal for action leading to a correction of the incongruities which it points up month after month. The editor here meets the demand, although he insists that the charge of critical aloofness is unwarranted; every issue, every article, every item has insinuated the remedial measure. The demand, however, is for a specific program.

THE DIAGNOSIS

Let us first sum up the diagnosis. Society is sick, we say, because it is divided into those who live by their own production and those who live by the production of others. This we put down as an injustice, because we postulate the unquestionable right of every man to himself, and therefore to the results of his labor; the transfer of such property from one person to another, without adequate compensation, violates our sense of correctness.

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Leaving aside charity, gifts and family obligations, nobody willingly relinquishes possession of that which he produces without obtaining possession of that which he prizes as highly. Therefore, we are compelled to the conclusion that where such transfer does take place force or fraud, which is the same thing, must be present. This is so even when habitual acquiescence to force has dulled our power of perception, even when custom has regularized the robbery; inurement to slavery does not deny its existence.

What, then, is the nature of the force causing the economic injustice at issue? All inquiry along these lines leads to the law. The law is the flux through which political coercion works, and hence we trace the cause of the trouble to our political organization. It is by the power lodged in this political organization that some men acquire property at the expense of those who produce it. Those thus advantaged we call the privileged classes.

First among these classes is the group that exercises authority. We place it at the head of the list for several reasons. The total of the group's appropriations comes to an astounding half of all we produce; then, its power of enforcing exactions increases with every draught, putting us more and more under its domination in all matters; finally, it is on the authority exercised by this group that all privileges rest. For these reasons the politician must be put at the head of the predatory hierarchy.

Taxation is the lifeblood of political authority. If political authority were deprived of this method of exacting "dues and charges," it would collapse. But, this collapse would also bring down the entire structure of privilege supported by the power of the law. Hence every privileged group, consciously or unconsciously, and even though it grudgingly makes its contribution, favors the general scheme of taxation. The economic

tie-up between privilege and political power is strong. This tacit partnership, which is rooted in historic practices, is called the state. However, usage correctly limits the name to the political branch of the partnership, for its power of coercion is the keystone of the entire business.

The privileges handed down by power are various, and the identity of the groups enjoying them changes with the need of the political arm for support. Some participate directly in the returns from taxation; among these are subsidized industrialists and farmers, bondholders, pensioners of all sorts. Then there are the indirect beneficiaries of the tax system, primarily manufacturers and merchants who in the course of business pyramid profits on the taxes they are entrusted to collect, while those who are protected from foreign competition by our tariffs exact higher prices for their products. Others profit from legally made patent and franchise monopolies. Those who gain most from the tie-up with the law are the few, estimated at five percent of the population, who hold title to the "eminent domain" over which the state exercises authority; their privilege of collecting rent from producers, for whom the use of natural resources is a prime necessity, makes them, in the final analysis, the residuary legatees of all privilege.

This is the condition which causes the injustice complained of. The only way to correct it is to do away with the cause; that is, to abolish the state. Any attempt at reform is ruled out on the ground that there is no way of transmuting a malignant growth into a healthy one. It is abolition or sufferance.

PREPARATION

If we are agreed on what must be done, the next question is: How? Before we go into the matter of method, let me say that

I assume the willingness of those readers who have asked for it (and to whom I shall refer as “you”), to carry their share of the load. My experience with many who demand social action is that they speak for others, not themselves, being content to limit their cooperation to “moral support.” I am sure that such are not among those who have criticized *analysis* for its lack of a program.

You will admit that the force of resistance must be considerable to be effective; the number of those who recognize the antisocial character of the state must be enlarged. Many minds must be brought to the common purpose, and the only known means of accomplishing this is education. It is a laborious job, but it must be done. That you may be an effective educator, carrying conviction as well as knowledge, it is necessary that you be in full command of all the arguments and facts which bear on your thesis. Are you familiar with the historic genesis of the state? How well grounded are you in economic theory, so that you can demonstrate how political coercion channels goods from producer to nonproducer? Can you explain how the cost of social services, necessary for organized living, will be met when taxation is done away with? Are you prepared to prove that justice will be better served when individual integrity replaces political power? Unless you know all this, and more, your job must begin with self-education.

Satisfied that you are well enough along to tackle the job of disseminating knowledge, you seek minds capable of absorbing it. That I assure you, and I speak from long experience, is a fishing expedition that will yield picayune results; you must console yourself with the quality of your few recruits and hope that your movement will make progress because it is all wool and a yard wide. You pummel your students with arguments, you put them in the way of reading (and please don't forget

analysis), you convince them that the state is the root of all evil. They, in turn, carry on likewise, and in time you have a roster respectable enough to make its influence felt.

POLITICAL THERAPY

Meanwhile you consider strategy. The historical pattern for doing something about it is to confront political power with organized opposition, which is, of course, political power. While vengeance is sometimes satisfied by this head-on collision of forces, the record shows that the principles of justice remain exactly where they were before. And this is so whether the conflict takes the form of violent revolution or a battle of the ballot box. The reason for this invariable outcome is found in the technique necessary to political action.

Leadership is the first requirement, for an army without direction is a mob, easily dispersed by the first concentrated charge. I nominate myself for the job, not because of any particular qualifications, but because I know myself and believe I can prognosticate my behavior as leader. Well, then, we have brought the opposition to terms, under my leadership, and it is now my duty and desire to carry out the mission entrusted to me. But, I know I am a human being, with the usual run of desires and the usual aversion to labor, and these impulses keep tugging at me while I am carrying out the common purpose. If in putting this purpose into practice the opportunity to barter power for self-betterment presents itself, I am afraid I might be tempted; it has happened with other leaders, and why should I deem myself exempt? Under the head of "realism" I will find justification enough for swerving from my appointed course. Or, I might be pushed into expediency by the self-interest of

those who share power with me, for they too, despite their devotion to principle, are human.

The failure of every political movement to bring about social betterment is thus inherent in its technique, and we are forced to the conclusion that politics can never do the job. Something else must be tried. The state itself suggests an alternative.

THE VULNERABLE STATE

The weakness of the state is that it is an aggregate of humans; its strength lies in the general ignorance of that fact. From earliest times the covering up of this vulnerability has engaged the ingenuity of political power; all manner of argument has been adduced to lend the state a superhuman character, and rituals without end have been invented to give this fiction a verisimilitude of reality. The divinity with which the king found it necessary to endow himself has been assumed by a mythical fifty-one percent who in turn ordain those who rule over them. To aid the process of canonization, the personages in whom power resides have set themselves off by such artifices as high-sounding titles, distinctive apparel, and hierarchical insignia. Language and behavior mannerisms—called protocol—emphasize their separatism. Nevertheless, the fact of mortality cannot be denied, and the continuity of political power is manufactured by means of awe-inspiring symbols, such as flags, thrones, wigs, monuments, seals, and ribbons; these things do not die. By way of litanies a soul is breathed into the golden calf and political philosophy anoints it a “metaphysical person.”

But Louis XIV was quite literal in proclaiming, “*L’etat c’est moi.*” The state is a person or a number of persons who exercise force, or the threat of it, to cause others to do what they oth-

erwise would not do, or to refrain from satisfying a desire. That is, the state is political power, and political power is force exerted by persons on persons. The superhuman character given it is intended to induce subservience. The strength of the state is Samsonian, and can be shorn off by popular recognition of the fact that it is only a Tom, a Dick, and a Harry.

THE ONLY CURE

We must disabuse our minds of the thought that the state *is* a thief; the state *are* thieves. It is not a system which creates privileges, it is a number of morally responsible mortals who do so. A robot cannot declare war, nor can a general staff conduct one; the motivating instrument is a man called king or president, a man called legislator, a man called general. In thus identifying political behavior with persons we prevent transference of guilt to an amoral fiction and place responsibility where it rightly belongs.

Having fixed in our minds the fact that the state is a number of persons who are up to no good, we should proceed to treat them accordingly. You do not genuflect before an ordinary loafer; why should you do so in the presence of a bureaucrat? If someone high in the hierarchy hires a hall, and with your money, stay away; the absent audience will bring him to a realization of his nothingness. The speeches and the written statements of the politician are directed toward influencing your good opinion of political power, and if you neither listen to the one nor read the other you will not be influenced and he will give up the effort. It is the applause, the adulation we accord political personages that records our acquiescence in the power they yield; the deflation of that power is in proportion to our

disregard of these personages. Without a cheering crowd there is no parade.

Social power alone can bring down the top layer of political skulduggery to its moral level. Those whose self-respect has not dropped below the vanishing point will get out of the business and put themselves to honest work, while the degenerates who remain will have to get along on what little they can pick up from a noncooperative public. Below the top layer there are the millions of menials who are more to be pitied than scorned; you find it difficult to censure the man whose incompetence forces him to the public trough. Yet, if you take the "poor John" attitude toward him you keep him reminded of a higher moral standard, and you may thus help him save himself.

A government building you regard as a charnel house, which in fact it is; you enter it always under duress, and you never demean yourself by curtsying to its living or dead statuary. The stars on the general's shoulders merely signify that the man might have been a useful member of society; you pity the boy whose military garb identifies his servility. The dais on which the judge sits elevates the body but lowers the man, and the jury box is a place where three-dollar-a-day slaves enforce the law of slavery. You honor the tax dodger. You do not vote because you put too high a value on your vote.

THE DOCTOR'S RESPONSIBILITY

Social power resides in every individual. Just as you put personal responsibility on political behavior, so must you assume personal responsibility for social behavior. It is your own job. You think poorly of legislator Brown not because he has violated a tenet of the Tax Reform Society to which you belong, but because his voting for a tax levy is in your own estimation

an act of robbery. It is not a peace society which passes judgment on the warmaker, it is the individual pacifist. All values are personal. The good society you envision by the decline of the state is a society of which you are an integral part; your campaign is therefore your own obligation.

You are ineffective alone? You need an organization before you can begin? Individuals think, feel, and act; the organization serves only as a mask for those unable to think or unwilling to act on their own convictions. In the end every organization vitiates the ideal which at first attracted members, and the more powerful the organization, the surer this result. This is so because the organization is a compromise of private values, and in the effort to find a workable compromise, the lowest common denominator, descending as the membership increases, becomes the ideal. When you speak for yourself you are strong. The potency of social power is in proportion to the number who are of like mind, but that, as was said, is a matter of education, not organization.

Let's try social ostracism. It should work.