

Man vs. the State

By OSCAR B. JOHANSEN

To live, each man must labor in order to acquire the necessities to maintain his life — the primary needs being food, clothing, and shelter. There is only one place from which he can obtain these things, and that is land. Thus, every man has the right of access to land, for this comes from his right to life. If he does not have this right, then his right to life is meaningless.

Since all men have equal rights to life, they have equal rights to the opportunities of land. But, since two things cannot occupy the same place at the same time, some men will have access to the better opportunities, to which they are no more entitled than anyone else. It is to solve this problem that men require Government.

Government constitutes a group of people who divide the unequal opportunities of land among themselves — the equal claimants to these opportunities — on a basis of justice. If anyone can devise a means to do this without the collective action of men, then Government should not be necessary. But this appears to be as impossible to do as it is to live without eating.

Justice requires that Government allocate the parcels of land over which it has jurisdiction by means of leases based on auctions in which all could participate. The land area a particular Government would control probably would have to be of relatively small size, but that would depend upon circumstances. In cities, the land area would most likely be quite small; in rural areas, fairly large.

It is obvious that Government must be just large enough so that all can participate in the leasing as well as dividing the rent pro rata among all the members of the Government. The leasing might be annually, biennially, or for larger time periods, as desired by the members. Experience would determine which would be the best length of time.

Government is a voluntaristic organization, and as such is not responsible for protection, post offices, education, roads, and the various services which many assume are its functions. These functions belong in the marketplace.

The State, on the other hand, is a corruption of Government, whose *raison d'être* is protection of its citizens. The State is a monopoly of coercion. Ancients, such as Plato and Socrates, as well as philosophers Hegel and Hobbes, were obsessed with the concept that the State is something noble. Hegel was guilty of the absurdity that "the State is the Divine idea as it exists on earth."

While most people seldom question the validity of the State's existence, a few iconoclasts have looked upon it with the barest of toleration, if not downright antipathy. H.L. Mencken said; "The State... consists of a gang of men exactly like you and me... [who] have only a talent of getting and holding office." Voltaire argued that the State is a "force existing to transfer money from the pockets of one group of citizens into the pockets of another group," while Leo Tolstoy's caustic comment was that the "Government is an association of men who do violence to the rest of us." (Tolstoy does not differentiate between "Government" and the "State.")

In Albert Jay Nock's eyes, there are only two methods by which men can apply the immutable Natural Law governing all human behavior, that all men seek to satisfy their desires with the least effort. One is the economic means, i.e., working to satisfy desires; the second is the political means, i.e., the forceful acquisition, by legal or illegal means, of the wealth of others. Putting it simply, men can satisfy their desires with the least effort by working or stealing. However, as stealing is repugnant to human beings, they becloud that fact even to themselves by all manner of sanctions or prohibitions which they acquire from the State. Consciously or unconsciously, they devise a rationale which convinces them that they are rendering a service to their fellowmen, when actually they are robbing them.

Since men require Government to allocate the opportunities of land among themselves, they have assumed that the State is Government. But the State is merely a group of people having a monopoly of coercive power, organized to exploit the political means.

Those in control of the modern State no doubt sincerely may believe they are utilizing State power for the benefit of the people. However, since by its very nature the State is an exploitative institution, its exploitation continues. Instead of taking the crude form of outright theft as practiced by feudal robber barons, the modern State exploits the producers of wealth for whichever class controls. In the Merchant State, the exploitation is for the benefit of the landowners and commercial interests. In America, today, the exploitation is tending increasingly to be for the "disenfranchised classes," the non-producers, and the poor.

Without realizing it, man in his relation to the State is in a paradoxical position. On the one hand, he is in conflict with it in his opposition to the constantly increasing taxation and regulations. On the other hand, he looks upon it to provide physical protection as well as social welfare of one sort or another. That he gets little physical protection is proved by the high crime rate; and in war time, instead of the State protecting him, he is conscripted to protect it. And the social welfare programs are merely the shifting of income from one class of people to other classes, with those in control of the State acquiring a goodly share in the form of munificent salaries and other perks.

Inasmuch as the State is an unjust institution, sooner or later it will collapse. This breakdown is highlighted in the history books as an exhausting war or revolution. If it is a great State, as was ancient Rome, the great civilization which it had established declines, to be succeeded by nations, as in western Europe, where more freedom existed.

People have never created Governments, only States. However, as human beings have largely eliminated the iniquitous practice of human slavery, there is hope that some day they will eliminate the State and substitute Government. But this will require a better understanding of human relationship to land and Government.

Our insistent cry should be: Government, Yes!! The State, No!!