

Subj: Legalized looting

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Legalized looting

By Tibor R. Machan
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I'd like to remind readers that there are better ways to fund the legitimate functions of government than taxation. The latter, it must be remembered, is a relic of the feudal past that the American Revolution and form of government had essentially rejected. Kings taxed because they owned their countries and those living and working there owed them rent!

Once it is the citizens who own — as the ones with a right to private property — what exists in a country is that no rent is due the king or the government. Instead, government must be paid for its services. While this subject isn't widely studied by experts in public finance — who, sadly, haven't yet joined the revolution — it is possible to think of alternatives to taxation even without the details fully worked out. For example, government can charge for every contract it backs with its court, police and military system (for these, essentially, defend the rule of law in a free society). You can still base your agreement on a handshake, if that's what you want, but few would take that risk.

Anyway, once this is dear, we can now check what contemporary politicians running for office usually haggle about. They do so about whose tax scheme will be more efficient, less onerous, less unfair. We see Gore, Bradley, Bush, Forbes, Trump and the rest all nit pick one

another to distraction on that score. Yet, fundamentally; what such disputations are about is this: "Who will loot the American people more effectively, so the victim complains less harshly and pays up more willingly?"

Put in these terms, of course, there cannot be a good answer to this because nothing that is ultimately immoral can be done right. It is a contradiction in terms to think of the right kind of taxation, any more than one can think of the right kind of burglary, assault or rape. No such thing exists. In the meanwhile, all these debates end in confusion, with heads shaking about what just went on. Certainly this is a radical idea, but then radical in itself need not be bad. So was the idea that women ought to get to vote or that slavery must be abolished. Indeed, the American political tradition could be viewed as quite radical, what with the belief in individual rights supplanting the belief in treating individuals as mere subjects to be ordered around by some alleged natural superiors. Even in our day this is deemed to be radical and many governments around the globe reject it because it threatens their extensive authority.

So the mere fact that taxes have always been part of social life may simply be akin to the fact that cheating has always been part of marriage or loafing part of work — regrettable but by no means necessary and proper at all.

As to those who believe taxation is essential for helping the poor and the unfortunate, here is what needs to be noted: Ultimately government does not help but merely shifts around burdens, temporarily, with relief here for a while turning into a hardship after a bit, rendering the system equally corrupt by failing to rid it of its cancer. Helping the poor and the unfortunate must, in a free society, be the function of personal goodwill leading to generosity, charity, compassion and the like. Taking a gun, putting it to Peter's head and then dipping into his pockets to lift some loot to help out Paul is not the answer, however well entrenched folks are in the belief that it is. The problem is that even in America most folks just haven't figured out how unusual are the founding ideas, those in the Declaration of Independence. To really appreciate that everyone has the basic, unalienable right to his or her life, liberty and pursuit of happiness requires casting aside some ancient notions. No, you do not belong to your society or tribe or race

or class but your life is yours to govern. And that means that what belongs to you is also yours to govern. So when the government and its apologists say that you must pay them part of your income in order to be able to work and live, that amounts to extortion, nothing less. Please listen to the political candidates and at least consider that when they bicker about how much of our income they will take from us, they are debating a detail about how to legally rob us of what belongs to us.

It is about time that some serious, viable candidate raises the issue — hinted at here and there when some politicians tell us that a surplus should be returned to us because it belongs to us to start with — whether taxation is even consistent with the fundamental values of the American political system.

Now that would make for an issue-oriented campaign.