

The Proper Role of Government

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My brethren and sisters: Humbly and gratefully I stand before you.

I am truly thankful that the Church is led by a prophet of God, who, as chief watchman on the towers of Zion, has the courage and inspiration to speak out against current evils as he has done again today. Thank God for David O. McKay, our Prophet-leader!

Gratitude for Founding Fathers

I am humbly grateful to God for the blessings we all enjoy as citizens of these great United States of America. I am grateful for our Founding Fathers who were raised up with the courage to give their lives, with the unselfishness to give their fortunes and the vision to pledge their sacred honor in order to establish a new kind of government of their own choosing where men might be free. I am additionally grateful that these Founding Fathers had the faith and humility to accept the divine inspiration so necessary in setting forth the Constitution as the foundation for their new republic. The Lord said he raised up these founders and called them “wise men.”

Political opportunists

Men are often asked to express an opinion on a myriad of government proposals and projects. All too often, answers seem to be based not upon solid principle, but upon the popularity of the specific government program in question. Seldom are men willing to oppose a popular program if they themselves wish to be popular—especially if they seek public office.

Such an approach to vital political questions of the day can only lead to public confusion and legislative chaos. Decisions of this nature should be based upon and measured against certain basic principles regarding the proper role of government. If principles are correct, then they can be applied to any specific proposal with confidence.

Unlike the political opportunist, the true statesman values principle above popularity and works to create popularity for those political principles which are wise and just.

Origin of human rights

It is generally agreed that the most important single function of government is to secure the rights and freedoms of individual citizens. But, what are those rights? And what is their source? Until these questions are answered, there is little likelihood that we can correctly determine how government can best secure them.

Let us first consider the origin of those freedoms we have come to know as human rights. Rights are either God-given as part of the divine plan or they are granted by government as part of the political plan. Reason, necessity, tradition, and religious convictions all lead me to accept the divine origin of these rights. If we accept the premise that human rights are granted by government, then we must be willing to accept the corollary that they can be denied by government.

I support the doctrine of separation of church and state as traditionally interpreted to prohibit the establishment of an official national religion. But this does not mean that we should divorce government from any formal recognition of God. To do so strikes a potentially fatal blow at the concept of the divine origin of our rights and unlocks the door for an easy entry of future tyranny. If Americans should ever come to believe that their rights and freedoms are instituted among men by politicians and bureaucrats, then they will no longer carry the proud inheritance of their forefathers, but will grovel before their masters seeking favors and dispensations, a throwback to the feudal system of the Dark Ages.

Man superior to government

Since God created man with certain inalienable rights, and man, in turn, created government to help secure and safeguard those rights, it follows that man is superior to the creature which he created. Man is superior to government and should remain master over it, not the other way around. Even the nonbeliever can appreciate the logic of this relationship.

A government is nothing more or less than a relatively small group of citizens who have been hired, in a sense, by the rest of us to perform certain functions and discharge certain responsibilities which have been authorized. The government itself has no innate power or privilege to do anything. Its only source of authority and power is from the people who created it.

Delegation of powers

Keep in mind that the people who have created their government can give to that government only such powers as they themselves have. They cannot give that which they do not possess.

In a primitive state, there is no doubt that each man would be justified in using force, if necessary, to defend himself against physical harm, against theft of the fruits of his labor, and against enslavement by another.

Indeed, the early pioneers found that a great deal of their time and energy was being spent defending themselves, their property, and their liberty. For man to prosper, he cannot afford to spend his time constantly guarding his family, his fields, and his property against attack and theft. When he joins together with his neighbors and hires a sheriff, government is born. The individual citizens delegate to the sheriff their unquestionable right to protect themselves. The sheriff now does for them only that which they had a right to do for themselves—nothing more.

But suppose pioneer “A” wants another horse for his wagon. He doesn’t have the money to buy one, but since pioneer “B” has an extra horse, he decides that he is entitled to share in his neighbor’s good fortune. Is he entitled to take his neighbor’s horse? Obviously not! If his neighbor wishes to give it or lend it, that is another question. But so long as pioneer “B” wishes to keep his property, pioneer “A” has no just claim to it.

If “A” has no proper power to take “B’s” property, can he delegate any such power to the sheriff? No. Even if everyone in the community desires that “B” give his extra horse to “A,” they have no right individually or collectively to force him to do it. They cannot delegate a power they themselves do not have.

Function of government

The proper function of government is limited only to those spheres of activity within which the individual citizen has the right to act. By deriving its just powers from the governed, government becomes primarily a mechanism for defense against bodily harm, theft, and involuntary servitude. It cannot claim the power to redistribute the wealth or force reluctant citizens to perform acts of charity against their will. Government is created by man. No man can delegate a power that he does not possess. The creature cannot exceed the creator.

In general terms, therefore, the proper role of government includes such defensive activities as maintaining national military and local police forces for protection against loss of life, loss of property, and loss of liberty at the hands of either foreign despots or domestic criminals.

It also includes those powers necessarily incidental to the protective function.

We should recognize that government is no plaything. It is an instrument of force; and unless our conscience is clear that we would not hesitate to put a man to death, put him in jail, or forcibly deprive him of his property for failing to obey a given law, we should oppose that law.

Constitution an Inspired document

The Constitution of the United States, an inspired document, is a solemn agreement between the citizens of this nation that every officer of government is under a sacred duty to obey.

The Constitution provides that the great bulk of the legitimate activities of government are to be carried out at the state or local level. This is the only way in which the principle of self-government can be made effective.

The smallest or lowest level that can possibly undertake the task is the one that should do so. The smaller the governmental unit and the closer it is to the people, the easier it is to guide it, to correct it, to keep it solvent, and to keep our freedom.

Remember that the people of the states of this republic created the federal government. The federal government did not create the states.

Self-proclaimed powers

A category of government activity that not only requires the closest scrutiny but that also poses a grave danger to our continued freedom is the activity not within the proper sphere of government. No one has the authority to grant such powers as welfare programs, schemes for redistributing the wealth, and activities that coerce people into acting in accordance with a prescribed code of social planning. There is one simple test. Do I as an individual have a right to use force upon my neighbor to accomplish this goal? If I do, then I may delegate that power to my government to exercise it in my behalf. If I do not have that right, I cannot delegate it.

If we permit government to manufacture its own authority and to create self-proclaimed powers not delegated to it by the people, then the creature exceeds the creator and becomes master. Who is to say "this far, but no farther"? What clear principle will stay the hand of government from reaching farther and farther into our daily lives? Grover Cleveland said that "though the people

support the Government, the Government should not support the people.

Legalized plunder

Once government steps over this clear line between the protective or negative role into the aggressive role of redistributing the wealth through taxation and providing so-called "benefits" for some of its citizens, it becomes a means for legalized plunder. It becomes a lever of unlimited power that is the sought-after prize of unscrupulous individuals and pressure groups, each seeking to control the machine to fatten his own pockets or to benefit his favorite charity, all with the other fellow's money, of course. Each class or special interest group competes with the others to throw the lever of governmental power in its favor, or at least to immunize itself against the effects of a previous thrust. Labor gets a minimum wage. Agriculture gets a price support. Some consumers demand price controls. In the end, no one is much further ahead, and everyone suffers the burdens of a gigantic bureaucracy and a loss of personal freedom. With each group out to get its share of the spoils, such governments historically have mushroomed into total welfare states. Once the process begins, once the principle of the protective function of government gives way to the aggressive or redistributive function, then forces are set in motion that drive the nation toward totalitarianism.

Workers create wealth

No government in the history of mankind has ever created any wealth. People who work create wealth.

The free creative energy of this choice nation "created more than 50 percent of all the world's products and possessions in the short span of 160 years. The only imperfection in the system is the imperfection in man himself." (James R. Evans, *The Glorious Quest* [Chicago: Charles Hallberg and Company].)

Marxist doctrine

According to Marxist doctrine, a human being is primarily an economic creature. His material well-being is all important; his privacy and his freedom are secondary. The Soviet constitution reflects this philosophy in its emphasis on security: food, clothing, housing, medical care—the same things that might be considered in a jail. The basic concept is that the government has full responsibility for the welfare of the people and, in order to discharge that responsibility, must assume control of all their activities. It is significant that in actuality the Russian people have few of the rights supposedly "guaranteed" to them in their constitution, while the American people have them in abundance even though they are not guaranteed. The reason is that material gain and economic prosperity and security simply cannot be guaranteed by any government. They are the result and reward of hard work and industrious production. Unless the people bake one loaf of bread for each citizen, the government cannot guarantee that each will have one loaf to eat. Constitutions can be written, laws can be passed, and imperial decrees can be issued, but unless the bread is produced, it can never be distributed.

Destruction of productive base

Why, then, do Americans bake more bread, manufacture more shoes, and assemble more TV sets than Russians do? They do so precisely because our government does not guarantee these things. If it did, there would be so many accompanying taxes,

controls, regulations, and political manipulations that the productive genius that is America's would soon be reduced to the floundering level of waste and inefficiency now found behind the Iron Curtain.

Any attempt through governmental intervention to redistribute the material rewards of labor can only result in the eventual destruction of the productive base of society, without which real abundance and security for more than the ruling elite is quite impossible.

What happens to a nation that ignores these basic principles? Former FBI agent Dan Smoot succinctly points this out:

“England was killed by an idea; the idea that the weak, indolent, and profligate must be supported by the strong, industrious, and frugal—to the degree that tax consumers will have a living standard comparable to that of taxpayers; the idea that government exists for the purpose of plundering those who work to give the product of their labor to those who do not work.

“The economic and social cannibalism produced by this communist-socialist idea will destroy any society which adopts it and clings to it as a basic principle—any society.”

Individual freedom ignored

This may sound heartless and insensitive to the needs of those less fortunate individuals who are found in any society, no matter how affluent. “What about the lame, the sick and the destitute?” is an often-voiced question. Most other countries have attempted to use the power of government to meet this need. Yet, in every case, the improvement has been marginal at best and has, in the long run, created more misery, more poverty, and certainly less freedom than when government first stepped in.

As Henry Grady Weaver wrote: “Most of the major ills of the world have been caused by well-meaning people who ignored the principle of individual freedom, except as applied to themselves, and who were obsessed with fanatical zeal to improve the lot of mankind-in-the-mass through some pet formula of their own. . . . The harm done by ordinary criminals, murderers, gangsters, and thieves is negligible in comparison with the agony inflicted upon human beings by the professional ‘do-gooders,’ who attempt to set themselves up as gods on earth and who would ruthlessly force their views on all others—with the abiding assurance that the end justifies the means.” (*The Mainspring of Human Progress.*)

Reliance on individual action

America has traditionally followed Jefferson's advice of relying on the profit motive, individual action, and charity. The United States has fewer cases of genuine hardship per capita than any other country in the world now or throughout all history. Even during the depression of the 1930's, Americans ate and lived better than most people in other countries do today.

History proves that the growth of the welfare state is difficult to check before it comes to its full flower of dictatorship. But let us hope that this time around, the trend can be reversed. If not, then we will see the inevitability of complete socialism—probably within our lifetime.

Three factors may make a difference: (1) sufficient historical knowledge of the failures of socialism in contrast to the proven success of free enterprise; (2) modern means of rapid communications to transmit this information to a large literate

population; (3) a growing number of dedicated men and women actively working to promote a wider appreciation of these basic concepts. The timely joining together of these three factors may make it entirely possible for us to reverse the trend.

Cut welfare-state features

How is it possible to cut out the various welfare-state features of our government that have already fastened themselves like cancer cells onto the body politic? Can drastic surgery be performed without endangering the patient? Drastic measures are called for. No compromise actions will suffice. Like all surgery, it will not be without discomfort and perhaps even some scar tissue for a long time to come. But it must be done if the patient is to be saved—and it can be done without undue risk.

Not all welfare-state programs currently in force can be dropped simultaneously without causing tremendous economic and social upheaval. The first step toward restoring the limited concept of government should be to freeze all welfare-state programs at their present levels, making sure that no new ones are added. The next step would be to allow all present programs to run out their term with absolutely no renewal. The third step would involve the gradual phasing-out of those programs which are indefinite in their term. The bulk of the transition could be accomplished, I believe, within a ten-year period and virtually completed within 20 years.

Return to basic concepts

We must return to basic concepts and principles, to eternal verities in this choice land. There is no other way. The storm signals are up. They are clear and ominous.

We are building up a generation of lazy, government-dole-consuming weaklings. If this Communist-planned program of deception is not stopped, it will destroy our nation.

As Americans—citizens of the greatest nation under heaven—we face difficult days. Never since the days of the Civil War—100 years ago—has this choice nation faced such a crisis.

I have faith in the American people. I pray that we will refrain from doing anything further that will jeopardize in any manner, our priceless heritage. This is a choice land. If we live and work so as to enjoy the approbation of a Divine Providence, we cannot fail. Without that help, we cannot long endure.

As Americans, let us put our courage to the test—to be firm in the conviction that our cause is just, to reaffirm our faith in all things for which true Americans have always stood in years past.

Let all Americans arouse themselves and stay aroused. We must stop and then reverse the concessions we have made to socialistic Communism at home and abroad. We should oppose these evil forces from our position of strength, for we are not weak.

There is much work to be done. The time is short. Let us begin in earnest—now—and may God bless our efforts, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.