

forms of discrimination based on religion are also illegal. But the left's position is precisely that homosexuality *is* immutable in the same sense as race: that's the basis for equating condemnation of homosexual activity with bigotry. This is the proposition that homosexual "rights" laws dictate we all adopt, the proposition about which the left will brook no dissent (First Amendment or no First Amendment), the proposition that makes the expression of traditional religious or moral beliefs suspect and could make such expression evidence of discriminatory motive. Laws such as Assemblyman Antonio Villaraigosa's AB 257, which passed the Assembly June 3, literally equate hostility toward homosexuality with racial and ethnic bigotry under the California Fair Employment and Housing Act. If the Senate passes and the governor signs AB 257, employers' expression of religious or moral beliefs opposed to homosexual conduct could become

actionable as "discrimination" or "harassment" against homosexuals. Individual supervisors or co-workers may find themselves in the position of Reverend Lumpkin, being excoriated for believing in the Bible or expressing opposition to the homosexual lifestyle.

Just as dirty jokes can bring sexual harassment lawsuits and just as racial slurs (real or, as in Texaco's case, imagined) can lead to *million dollar* settlements, casual workplace conversation about homosexuality could lead to costly and intrusive litigation. AB 257 is not a neutral law; it takes sides in the culture war on behalf of homosexuality. In the hands of an activist judiciary, AB 257 will be a cudgel to beat righteous individuals and organizations into submission. The supporters of AB 257 regard themselves as "open-minded" and "tolerant," but they are leading a witch hunt that would make Orwell or Kafka smile understandingly.

CPR

THE MIDNIGHT ECONOMIST

Kindly Advice from Old Albion

By Jove, it seems we Americans aren't taxed enough!

W I L L I A M R . A L L E N

I TRY TO be patient and brave. Chin up, stout fellow, eyes front, stiff upper lip, and all that. But, made of frail flesh, I can gracefully tolerate only a finite amount of commonly found editorial economics and journalistic analytics.

An economics writer from a London newspaper visited the United States. He wrote an essay for a Los Angeles paper on the peculiarities of American local government finance. Like some Englishmen before him, he feels that Americans are not taxed enough.

"Voters here, as elsewhere in the industrial world," he tells us with proper British condescension, "have been tricked into believing that taxation is by definition wasteful; that by cutting taxes government will somehow unleash an explosion of private-sector energy that will quickly fill the vacuum left by the state;

that it is better to pay a private contractor to take away your garbage even if it costs you twice as much as the public service." As an additional example of private-sector inadequacy, he notes: "It is pointless to fill the pothole outside your own house if your car is going to fall through the pavement in the next block." The writer might consider the following over tea: First, only anarchists would believe that "taxation is by definition wasteful" — and I am acquainted with no anarchists.

Second, while government is required for society, it does not follow that *more* government is surely better. There must be taxation, but do not flippantly deny that taxes can be collected ineptly on too large a scale, with government expenditures done badly on wrong things.

Third, while there *are* legitimate government projects, learning specific community preferences and pursuing them efficiently is not easily done. Political processes and machinations cannot match market pro-

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cedures and mechanisms in registering demands and organizing production.

Fourth, the widespread “tax revolt” of the late 1970s had to use crude political means, so it was not implemented with refined precision. But it was a revolt against a genuine and genuinely fearsome ham-handed aggrandizement by Little Brother. From 1947 to 1975, the ratio of state and local expenditures to gross national product came close to tripling — a much faster rate of increase than for federal expenditures.

Fifth, the journalist really should look at the record of “cutting back city hall,” which just happens to be the title of an enlightening book by Reason Foundation President Robert W. Poole, Jr. Looking there or in other sources, he would find that — quite predictably — in a great number of cities with a huge range of sizes over a considerable period, some sort of private-industry collection of trash has been dramatically more economical than is municipal collection. And even street repair commonly can be done better by private firms contracted by government than by workers employed by government.

Garbage collection and street repair are not the

only areas where we have gained or might gain by introducing greater rationality through price-and-cost calculations by those with personal incentives of gain or preference. Among other possibilities, at different levels of government, are: urban transportation, highway maintenance and use, health care, schooling, police and fire protection, golf courses, airports and rail systems, custodial services, wastewater treatment, hospitals and paramedic services, message and parcel delivery, parks and zoos, workers’ compensation, and Social Security.

NO STRATEGY, no institutional revamping, can transform an economy of inherent scarcity (as all economies are) into one of abundance. The world will, in any case, continue to be occupied by grubby and often inept people. But surveying the lessons, here and abroad, of experience with “privatization” — substituting competitive market methods and incentives for those of bureaucratic government monopolization — can provide a belated beginning of journalistic education, even for Englishmen.

CPR

EDUCATION

The Bureaucrat’s Superhighway

Internet computers and education: gateways or distractions?

A N D R E W J . P E T E R S O N

IN THE March issue of *New Criterion*, Hilton Kramer warns that “the bureaucratic superhighway” is the unprincipled politician’s dream: “a seductively mystifying technology, the vague promise of unlimited ‘educational’ benefits, and the potential for creating dozens of new regulations, permits, certification requirements, and training programs — along with, of course, a vast new government bureaucracy to oversee it all.”

Money, like religion, can attract very powerful forces which do not reflect the original intent of an enter-

prise. The project of K-12 education in California has an annual budget of more than \$30 billion dollars. And the spending has accelerated. In real dollars, this is almost 50 percent more than the record set 10 years ago. Thus, when a buzzword like “Internet” or “computer literacy” arrives, it is a hot button which will be pushed for big dollars. President Clinton and Vice-President Gore, for instance, have made wiring schools and libraries for the Internet a feature of their never-ending campaign for popular opinion. In fact, Albert Gore wants to do for this information highway what his senator-father did for the interstate highway — all with federal dollars. In California alone, more than \$50 million dollars was spent specifically on educational

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