

One Result of All-Powerful Government and Centralized Power

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PEOPLE throughout the country are asking themselves the question: "Why are so many men in so many high places in Washington involved in so much corruption?" They observe huge cash payments, unreported, being made to national political campaigns and wonder why so many businessmen feel the need to involve themselves in politics. Unfortunately, the answers we receive to such questions miss the point entirely. We are told, in response, that we need more honest men in government, or stricter laws, or more Congressional control.

It may be true that we need more honest men in Washington, for politics, as President Eisenhower once reflected, "is too important for the politicians." It may

also be true that we need stricter laws and additional control by the Congress. But the simple reason why so many businessmen are involved in politics is that politics is so involved in business. If government did not have the power to set wages and prices, no one would feel the need to bribe anyone for a favorable ruling. If government did not have huge contracts to bestow in a multiplicity of fields, no one would need to pay off politicians for a piece of the action. If government did not provide itself with the power to regulate, in the name of "safety" or "ecology" or whatever, no one would feel the need to bribe anyone for or against a particular ruling.

It is inevitable, as government becomes more and more powerful and controls more and more aspects of our lives, that Americans will seek to influence that govern-

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ment through campaign contributions and other forms of reward. It is similarly inevitable that men in political life, with such enormous power at their disposal, will be tempted to accept such bribery. Changing the men and keeping the system as it is will change very little.

Earlier Scandals

The trend toward government control of the nation's economy goes back to the latter part of the nineteenth century. Discussing the age of the "Robber Barons," Gustavus Myers, in his book, *History Of The Great American Fortunes*, places great stress upon the low level of political morality which was evidenced in the rush to accommodate the highest bidder from the business community. Describing the situation in New York State, Myers charges that, "Laws were sold at Albany to the highest bidder."

In an article prompted by the Credit Mobilier scandal, E. L. Godkin, editor of the *Nation*, warned that the only lasting answer to bribery and corruption would be an end to the power of congressmen to bestow great privileges upon private individuals or corporations. Godkin wrote: "The remedy is simple. The Government must get out of the 'protective' business and the 'subsidy' busi-

ness and the 'improvement' business and the 'development' business. It must let trade and commerce, and manufactures, and steamboats and railroads, and telegraphs alone. It cannot touch them without breeding corruption."

The Bewildered Society

Discussing the tendency at this time to look at the scandals of the past — and present — and conclude from them that what we need is more and not less governmental authority, George Roche III, in his volume, *The Bewildered Society*, notes that, "Advocates of centralized authority and economic control in the twentieth century look back to the so-called era of Reconstruction and big business to point out its evils with great glee and to suggest that those evils are a prima facie case for the necessity of more political control of business. The very reverse is actually the case . . . All of the significant scandals of the nineteenth century were closely connected with the exercise of political power."

Dr. Roche points out that, ". . . there evolved the dichotomy which saw businessmen preaching laissez faire doctrine for everyone else, while asking for government assistance in their own particular case."

The recent revelations with regard to the Nixon Administration

— the Vesco funds, the contribution from the milk producers, the airlines, and so forth — are simply part of the ongoing reality of corruption in a society where government becomes the arbiter of all things. Similarly, the use of the Internal Revenue Service by those in power to punish opponents is only additional proof that those who argued that the power to tax is the power to destroy were quite right.

**To Restore Integrity,
Limit Government's Power**

If Americans seek to restore honesty and integrity to government, the first step in the proper direction would be to begin divesting government of its power over the nation's economy, its schools, and its farms. A government which did not have favors to bestow would not be a recipient of secret cash contributions. Politicians, without life and death power to wield, could more easily maintain their honesty and integrity.

If the Watergate hearings have an additional long-range lesson for the American people, it may be the fact that the dire warnings over the years by distinguished statesmen and scholars about the danger of an all-powerful executive were quite correct.

In *The Federalist Papers*, James

Madison declared that, "In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself."

During the years when, under the New Deal leadership of Franklin Roosevelt, the role of the executive was increasing in scope and was less and less subject to control by either the legislative or judicial branches of government, it was conservative Republicans such as Senator Robert Taft of Ohio who warned of the dangers of executive power.

Discussing the manner in which we went to war in Korea, without a Congressional declaration, Senator Taft stated that, "If in the great field of foreign policy the President has the arbitrary and unlimited powers he now claims, then there is an end to freedom in the United States not only in the foreign field but in the great realm of domestic activity which necessarily follows any foreign commitments."

During those years, it was the liberal Democrats who supported executive power, who opposed measures such as the Bricker Amendment which sought to limit it, and downgraded the role of the Congress.

How Did It Happen?

Now, with Watergate and the spectacle of non-elected and ambitious men charged with illegal and unethical activities, many Americans wonder how it is that the executive branch came to possess so much power and to view itself as above and beyond the law. Ironically, the liberals, whose policies have led to this state of affairs, are most aghast; while many conservatives, who always recognized the danger of arbitrary executive power, now tend to apologize for it, for it is being wielded by their own party.

The noted historian, Daniel M. Boorstin, states that one of the most important lessons to be learned from Watergate relates to the growth of the government's executive branch:

"There are hundreds of people who write on White House stationery. This is a new phenomenon. In fact, it's a phenomenon which has astonished, and properly astonished, some senators who asked the counsellor to the President if he ever saw the President and he said he didn't. And I think there are something like 40 persons who bear some title such as counsellor to the President or assistant to the President or something of that sort. Now this is a relatively new phenomenon: the opportunity for the President to

get out of touch with the people who speak in his name."

American political philosophy has always held that the legislative branch was to be the supreme branch of government. Philosopher John Locke, who profoundly affected the thinking of the Founding Fathers, is emphatic on the position of the legislative branch. In his *Second Treatise* he writes that, "There can be but one supreme power, which is the legislative, to which all the rest are and must be subordinate."

Departure from Tradition


Presidential dominance, which has been growing since the days of the New Deal, is inconsistent with the American political tradition. If men such as those involved in today's Watergate scandal, who are not elected by the people and cannot be voted out of office by the people, are unchecked in their exercise of power, the concept of representative and limited government is seriously challenged.

It is unfortunate that principle seems to play such an ambiguous role in American politics. The men who most feared executive power when the other party wielded it, are now becoming comfortable with it. Similarly, those who welcomed it when it was in their own hands, are now suspicious of it. This, of course, becomes argument

from mere circumstance, and not from principle. The American people deserve something better from their elected officials.

If we learn from Watergate to be suspicious of centralized power, whether in the hands of Democrats or Republicans, we will have learned an important lesson. During the colonial period, the anti-Federalists, men such as George Mason and Patrick Henry, opposed the ratification of the Constitution because they believed

that even that limited and limiting document provided for too strong an executive. "Did we fight King George III only to have an elected king?" they would ask. Their question still bears asking, for we in America do not want an elected king, but an executive to carry out the laws passed by the Congress.

Hopefully, Watergate will mark the end of the trend toward centralized power started in the New Deal. If it does, all of us will benefit. 

No Change By Usurpation

It is important, likewise, that the habits of thinking in a free country should inspire caution in those intrusted with its administration to confine themselves within their respective constitutional spheres, avoiding in the exercise of the powers of one department to encroach upon another. The spirit of encroachment tends to consolidate the powers of all the departments in one, and thus to create, whatever the form of government, a real despotism. A just estimate of that love of power and proneness to abuse it which predominates in the human heart is sufficient to satisfy us of the truth of this position. The necessity of reciprocal checks in the exercise of political power, by dividing and distributing it into different depositories, and constituting each the guardian of the public weal against invasions by the others, has been evinced by experiments ancient and modern, some of them in our country and under our own eyes. To preserve them must be as necessary as to institute them. If in the opinion of the people the distribution or modification of the constitutional powers be in any particular wrong, let it be corrected by an amendment in the way which the Constitution designates. But let there be no change by usurpation: for though this in one instance may be the instrument of good, it is the customary weapon by which free governments are destroyed.

GEORGE WASHINGTON'S *Farewell Address*

IDEAS ON



LIBERTY



Health Care, Human Rights AND Government Intervention

SEVENTEEN YEARS ago the Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises observed that the people of the United States enjoyed the highest standard of living of any people in the world; but only because the United States government embarked much later than the governments in other parts of the world upon the policy of obstructing human enterprise and endeavor.¹ The dismal results of government intervention in the areas of agriculture, education, employment, housing, urban renewal, mail carriage, and transportation, to name but a few, are a matter of record.^{2,3,4,5,6,7,8} Today it appears that the U.S. government is on the verge of a massive intervention into the practice of dentistry and medicine, because of an alleged

“health crisis” in America. This impending action, which has the blessing of both political parties

¹ Ludwig von Mises, *The Anti-Capitalistic Mentality*, (New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1956), p.v.

² Clarence B. Carson, *The War on the Poor*, (New Rochelle, N. Y., Arlington House, 1969), pp. 13-24, 69-116, 128-129, pp. 186ff.

³ R. W. Grant, *The Case Against Public Education*, (Washington, D.C., *Free Campus News*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1969), p. 2.

⁴ Roger A. Freeman, *Dead End in American Education*, (*National Review*, Vol. XXI, No. 1), pp. 22-24.

⁵ See Henry Hazlitt, *Man vs. the Welfare State*, (New Rochelle, N. Y., Arlington House, 1969) for a comprehensive overview, in layman's language, of the entire gamut of destructive government intervention into the economy.

⁶ Martin Anderson, *The Federal Bulldozer*, (New York, McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1967), pp. 52-70, 229.

⁷ Murray N. Rothbard, *Power and Market: Government and the Economy*, (Menlo Park, California, Institute for Humane Studies, 1970), pp. 19-59.

⁸ William C. Wooldridge, *Uncle Sam, The Monopoly Man*, (New Rochelle, N. Y., Arlington House, 1970), pp. 11-31.

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