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Origin and Nature of Government

Laurance Labadie

1958

At various times during the evolution of man, groups found themselves in a circumstance of real scarcity. When a group of people had food for only half their number, if they divided equally all would die, and history would hear no more of them.

It is man's nature to want to live, as an individual. Therefore scarcity begat a scramble, in which the stronger succeeded. Strength and predatoriness were life-preserving characteristics in a milieu of scarcity.

In a scramble, it would naturally be discovered that handicapping another—even killing him—would facilitate getting the goods in his possession. People learned another way of acquiring goods than working for them. Under the circumstances, robbery and accompanying murder appear to have been necessary if life were to continue. Individuals within tribes no doubt learned that cooperation in robbery was a safer procedure than lone robbery.

In time it must have occurred to someone that one tribe could rob another tribe. In such forays the winners would kill the losers. Natural handicaps made women weaker than men, so men became

the warriors and the women did the work. Women thus being useful, in subsequent raids they were captured instead of killed.

Somewhere along the line a fellow who had been clubbed for his goods survived, and proceeded to gather more goods. When this was observed, probably the greatest humanitarian idea that man has discovered throughout the ages was born—that it was not necessary to kill a man in order to get his goods. This boon was slavery, which at least promised a lease on life. Thus, in conquest between tribes, the conquerors became the rulers and the conquered the slaves.

This, in my view, was the origin of the State, which may be defined as an organization of rulers who rob the populace over which it can hold sway, and which uses that populace as soldiers to enlarge the territory and number of people it can exploit. The political history of the world has been the record of internal struggles to grasp State power, and between governments to enlarge their domains.

(That governments provide services which citizens want or can be persuaded to want, does not alter the basic concept of nature and origin of the State.)

The ruler-ruled relation became in the course of time so ingrained as to become a universal superstition. It is the common belief that no society could exist without government. Indeed, what government will allow anything else to be taught in the schools? Further, are citizens not taught that rulers should be loved and revered, particularly the kind of government that happens to be over them? In some societies people are allowed to choose their own bosses, which is supposed to be very advanced. This is the political condition of the world today.

When a “nation” is relatively wise politically it requires considerable force, in the shape of police and army, to keep the populace in their place. Where people are steeped in political ignorance, very little force is necessary, especially when the illusion is kept up that when choosing their rulers they are actually ruling themselves.

I know of hardly one reformer or any other person proposing any feature for the betterment of mankind, in a hundred thousand, who does not propose or expect to implement his proposition through the coercive power of the government. The method of political thought from Plato down to the technocrats was to pre-fabricate an ideal society, and then to get governmental power to coercively fit people to their systems. The classic example of this type of thinking and action is the attempt to impose systematic communism on a populace. Communism itself is such an infantile conception of the solution of the social problem that it is no accident of circumstance that it is accompanied by continual liquidations.

At the present time, the strongest support for government appears to be habit, a common garden variety of ignorance, credulity, and superstition, sustained by a vast amount of mis-education perpetuated by governmental schools in every quarter of the globe. To this must be added emergencies in which sections of a populace find themselves (such as the present-day farmer), in a predicament, the immediate release from which no other power than government appears to exist. Thus, from the very evils caused by government, do governments find a pretext to come in as succor, and thereby enhance their powers.

Irrespective of their relative banefulness (for some governments are worse than others) the present day power struggle between governments threatens the annihilation of mankind in a carnage that can hardly be conceived as possible in the absence of all governments whatsoever.