

The Political Enemy Is Politics Itself

Written by John W. Deming, as published in The Voluntaryist, August 1992.

The cause of the political disease is politics itself. Political means never achieve the ends sought. The goals of a sensible political state would be to reduce its presence in the lives of its citizenry to the greatest extent possible. And that's the real problem.

Who goes into politics, or any career for that matter, with the goal of permanently reducing and possibly eliminating the source of one's power, fame and money? The virtuous public servant is one of the biggest figments of imagination ever. Of course, the evil public servant is an idea just as false. Most bureaucrats are simply regular people practicing the social equivalent of alchemy and astrology. They are operating under an illusion. You wouldn't get stronger metals or gold using alchemical formulas. And you won't get financial security, inexpensive high-quality medical care, sound money, crime-free streets or good schools using political means. Ever.

Ludwig von Mises defined the political state thusly: "Government is in the last resort the employment of armed men, of policemen, gendarmes, soldiers, prison guards, and hangmen. The essential feature of government is the enforcement of its decrees by beating, killing and imprisoning. Those who are asking for more government interference are asking ultimately for more compulsion and less freedom."

State coercion does not work. Since the American Revolution, thoughtful people have assumed that political coercion was a necessary evil, inherently dangerous but essential to the maintenance of a well-ordered community. This assumption is false. Coercion is not only an evil, it is not necessary because it does not work.

The other side of that idea is that *freedom works*. Liberty leads to the free market and enterprises that serve the public with the products and services they really want. Freedom is not some fragile, Utopian affair that while spiritually desirable is too messy and impractical for the real world. When defined by property rights, freedom becomes a hardheaded practical thing that leads to societies that exhibit stable, long-term growth and happier, more productive citizens. Freedom is not at all the chaotic quasi-Hobbesian mess that the politicians would have us believe and which they offer themselves up to fix.

The free market adjusts the minute-by-minute results of myriad local transactions all over the world, right through to the global price and information grid with lightning rapidity. It leads to open-ended, multidirectional social evolution heading wherever free men and women dare to go.

Property rights, put simply, designate boundaries through which no one, particularly state officials and common criminals, may intrude without the permission of the owner. In effect, they define areas of human action where politics and its retinue of bureaucratic coercion cannot tread.

Thus the more property rights are expanded and strengthened, the less political coercion will dominate our lives, the more social order will emerge, and the higher quality and quantity of products and services we will have. And not coincidentally, a more vigorous culture of new artistic and scientific creations will arise. One of the striking facts of history is that those societies with the most freedom, as defined by property rights, have always had the greatest efflorescence of culture.