

Unlimited Voluntary Exchanges

Guest post by R. C. Hoiles. Originally published in The Voluntaryist, August 1985.

In a talk before the Exchange Club of Santa Ana on voluntaryism, I used the subject voluntaryism rather than libertarianism because I do not believe there is as much confusion about voluntaryism as there is about libertarianism. Libertarianism has become distorted to mean liberalism of other people's money.

My contention was that I believed in unlimited voluntary exchanges. Some of the points I tried to emphasize were that voluntaryism really meant that one should get what he gets by benefitting those from whom he gets it, that in voluntaryism not only both parties were benefited but everyone else in the world was benefited; that voluntaryism was, in reality, nothing but a free and unhampered market; that to the extent voluntaryism was practiced, every individual got all he produced, and the only fair way of measuring what each and every person produced was to have jobs interchangeable so that any person who thought he was getting too little and someone was getting too much would have not only the right, but it was his duty, to render a better service for the same money or the same service for less money, and thus benefit both parties to an exchange. Not only would both parties be benefited, but everybody else in the world would be benefited because each of the parties would be better able to benefit those with whom they exchanged.

I further tried to emphasize that voluntaryism meant that in creating wealth and exchanging it, both parties were benefited — that it was not like war or gambling or fraud where one man benefited and another man lost.

It was my contention that most people believed in voluntaryism as individuals but few people believed in voluntaryism in groups; that most people seemed to think it was all right to do things collectively, like getting a service on an involuntary basis when they would not think of trying to do it as an individual.

I pointed out that the two things that people seemed to believe were virtuous if done by a group but vicious if done by an individual were labor unions and government: that they seemed to believe that it was all right for government to initiate force to take from one to benefit another, but they could see that it was harmful and vicious and wicked for an individual to initiate force to take from one to give to another; that the government had passed laws that gave labor unions monopolies and the right to do things that would be a crime if done by other people; that this form of involuntaryism caused governments to grow and expand and eventually get so tyrannical that people overthrew them; that I could think of no way of keeping government down other than having it supported on a voluntary basis; that government would cost very little — maybe only 2 per cent or 3 per cent of the

national income — if it was limited to only trying to stop people from practicing involuntaryism in getting things.

It was my contention that voluntaryism was in the minds of the framers of the Declaration of Independence when they wrote that the governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed; that that meant exactly what it said and that if a man did not believe that everybody's life and property should be protected, he should not be forced to support the government, because if he was forced to pay taxes to support the government, in order to be fair he should have the right to vote. And then he would vote to take from one to give to another and there would be no limit to the growth of government; that governments in the United States used to take about 2 per cent or 3 per cent of total production and now they are taking around 33 per cent of what was produced — all because the majority of people believe that groups have a right to do things that they would hesitate to do as individuals. Since I do not believe very much in speeches where the speaker is protected from questions. I allowed about one-half the time for questions.

Of course, one of the questions usually asked is how you would raise the money to defend this country from a national standpoint. It was my contention that if the government were operated on a voluntary basis where they had no power to interfere with people freely exchanging goods and services throughout the world — that is, where we had no protective tariffs and immigration quotas — we wouldn't be in these wars and wouldn't need all this wealth for protection. It is the government practicing involuntaryism against the people of other governments that leads to war.

One man asked how the Civil War would have been handled. My answer was that if we had not had protective tariffs it is doubtful whether the South would even have wanted to secede, and if they had wanted to secede, they should have been permitted to secede if we followed the ideologies as set forth in the Declaration of Independence, that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed; that the North should have had such a good government that people wanted to belong to the government.

Another party observed that he had a visitor from India and that their wages were so low that if we permitted our workers to exchange with them our wages would become low. He wanted to know how voluntaryism would prevent such a catastrophe coming to the American people. My answer to that was that I spent three hours one day on a train with a student from China who was going to school in New York; that he contended the Chinese could not compete with the people in the United States because the people in the U.S. had such efficient tools that they could undersell the Chinese people. The people in the United States contend that they cannot compete with the people in China and India and other countries because their wages are so low.

Then I tried to explain that the wages there were so low because they did not have the tools and therefore each worker produced very little and could not be paid more than what the worker produced; that each man must produce his own wages. It was my contention, of course, that our standard of living would be a lot higher if we more nearly practiced voluntaryism on a free and unhampered market.

The members of the Exchange Club are performing a service because their ideology is that exchange of ideas is beneficial to everybody. And that is true because ideas come before things are created and exchanged. Anything that enlightens mankind is beneficial to everyone.

Yes, I am for unlimited voluntary exchanges.