

Comment by the Editor

LIBERTY AND SECURITY

Two great forces in human nature are always contending. One is a thirst for distinction, the other is a sense of equality; one is the source of individualistic philosophy, the other is the basis of collectivism; one is the bulwark of privilege, the other is the foundation of democracy. This eternal conflict of human motives has shaped the form and functions of government. Personal ambition must be served, but not at the price of social equilibrium. That government is best which provides the most liberty with the least danger to security.

Out of the Reformation and the revival of learning emerged a new conception of political structure. The privilege of leadership was no longer to be determined solely by the possession of land or ecclesiastical office. Invention, discovery, science, and movable property widened the field of power and opened the gates to popular sovereignty. With the democratization of political control came also the idea that government is for the people: welfare must be general. And so, anomalously, by means of collective protection of public interests a better opportunity for individual achievement is provided.

No nation was ever endowed with a public domain so large and rich as once belonged to the United States. Confronted with the obligation to administer this vast common property in the interest of all the people without unfairly diminishing freedom of personal enterprise, the government tried to guarantee equality of opportunity in the development of natural resources. The early policy of leasing instead of selling the lead mines was well calculated to result in public as well as private advantage. The regulations of the government were more liberal to the miners than private corporations would have imposed. And if the government had kept the mineral and oil deposits, production might have been managed for the benefit of the whole nation including future generations, and even the pain of taxation might have been greatly alleviated.

But the government, being human, is afflicted with the perpetual strife between individual ambition and social security. Consequently, no particular adjustment of liberty and equality can be permanent.

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