

Along the American Way by Wheeler McMillen

Good Labels for Bad Bills

How is the citizen to judge the merit of bills before Congress?

Here is a bill that proposes medical care for everybody; one is offered to support better educational facilities for areas where better schools are desirable; another bill plans to relieve practically everyone from saving for his old age.

Are you against the idea that everyone shall have medical care? Is there anyone who does not favor the best possible education for every youngster? Wouldn't it be nice if everyone could count on a secure and comfortable old age?

Certainly no reasonable person can oppose such purposes. Should everyone therefore be in favor of whatever bills that are introduced to accomplish them?

Without arguing the merit of particular bills, let's look at a fundamental principle that applies to some such proposals.



Two ideas of Government sharply oppose each other in today's world. This is nothing new. The same two ideas have been in conflict for centuries. The titanic struggle never ends. That is why "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty."

* * *

Our forefathers called one of these ideas tyranny. It has been called totalitarianism, autocracy, dictatorship, absolutism and other things. The philosopher's name for it is *Statism*. It says the State, or Government, shall be superior in power to the individual, and shall be conceded to be superior in wisdom.

Whatever the name, the idea remains the same. The result comes to the same point. Government becomes the master of the individual, rather than his servant.

Opposed to Statism is freedom, individual liberty. Here stands the idea that the Government is merely the servant of the citizen, that it has no powers except those which come from the people, and no wisdom except the

(continued)

wisdom of such men as the people hire to conduct their affairs.

* * *

The services which Government may perform are many. Government defends the people against aggression from without and against aggression from their fellow-citizens within. It carries the mail, charts the harbors, predicts the weather and maintains the national parks, for examples. Government thus serves as a sort of national co-operative to do things which individual interest would not freely attempt.

New services are constantly being proposed. They seem so desirable that generous-hearted citizens rally to their support.

Yet, very often the accomplishment of these fine purposes by law can be brought about only by giving Government new power over the actions of the citizen.

Sometimes such measures are offered not, as they are labelled, to help the less fortunate, but actually for the prime purpose of increasing the powers of Government.

The citizen may then well ask himself a basic question. Which does he think more important? The preservation, unimpaired, of the principle of individual freedom? Or, to take a chance that some desirable social objective will be hurried up?

* * *

He may want to keep in mind that under the American system of individual freedom more people have attained good education and good medical care, and more have been able to provide for their own old age than any other people have ever done anywhere under any system of Statism. What reason is there to suppose that, if left completely free, Americans cannot in a few more decades produce enough wealth to bring everybody up to or well above present standards?

One standard for judgment is whether a bill proposes to clip any citizen's liberty. If it does, the bill probably is bad.

