

“If We Had No Social Security, Many People Would Go Hungry”

BY PAUL L. POIROT

Compulsory Social Security has been the law of the land for almost three generations, and many citizens of the United States are now convinced that they couldn't get along without it. To express doubts about the propriety of the program is to invite the question: “Would you let them starve?”

Many Americans are old enough to remember things that happened prior to the passage of the Social Security Act in 1935, but where is one of them who ever watched a human being starve? No, we wouldn't “let them starve.” So why is it so widely believed that, without Social Security benefit payments, many people would go hungry?

The social security idea is based on the questionable premise that a person's usefulness ends at age 65. He is supposed to be without savings and without capacity to continue to earn his living. If that premise were correct, it would be easy to see how hunger might develop among the aged. If they're really good for nothing, who wants to be bothered to look after old folks!

Lumping people into groups and jumping to conclusions about each group (that is, people over 65 would go hungry without Social Security) is a standard procedure of government planning. A corollary conclusion is that breadwinners under 65 must be compelled by force of law to respect and care for their elders. These conclusions rest on false assumptions made by those having no faith in anyone else as an individual. Their faith is in coercion, and they thus conclude that government holds the answer to every problem.

Reduces Incentives

To those of little faith, it is necessary to explain again and again and again that government is noncreative and can distribute only what it first taxes away from the pro-

ductive efforts of individuals. “The people” are—first, last, and always—individuals, some more economically creative than others, but each worthy of respect as a human being. To tax a man's earnings and savings, for other than defensive purposes, is to reduce his capacity and his incentive to care for himself and for others, rendering him part slave to others and thus less than human. On the flip side, he who either volunteers or is forced to look to the taxing power of government for his livelihood is also enslaved and debased.

Slavery has been tried in the United States, unfortunately, and a major reason for its failure is that it was, and is, an unproductive way of life; it lets people go hungry. It is also morally degrading to master and slave alike. Yet, we are being told that without compulsory Social Security taxes upon the young and strong, the oldsters among us would go hungry—perhaps starve; we are invited to try once again a semi-slave system—under benevolent masters, of course. Well, those socialists are dead wrong. Their premises are faulty. Free human beings may be counted upon to care well for themselves and for their fellow men, voluntarily.

What should concern us all is that, *if we persist* under the false premises of the Social Security idea (socialism), many Americans *will* go hungry—not only physically hungry, but morally and spiritually starved as well.

The prime argument against Social Security is in the moral realm. Giving to one individual or group the fruits of the labor of others taken from them by coercion is an immoral procedure, with destructive effect upon the sense of personal responsibility of everyone involved. . . .

Paul Poirot was editor of The Freeman from 1956 until his retirement three decades later. He now resides in Pennsylvania. This is adapted from an article that originally was published in Clichés of Socialism and reprinted in the updated Clichés of Politics, both published by FEE.