

NOTES FROM WOODSONG

By William Samuel

Laws and Big Government By William Samuel

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What is the primary reason for big government? Population is certainly one of the problems, but not the main one. Government's growth is proportional to two things: population and the number of laws.

Imagine a garden just hacked out of the jungle. That garden is the original 13 colonies just after we threw off the burden of England. We were a brand new nation and free of British tyranny. Not a single law existed. There wasn't a law book in the whole land. We were totally free. By definition, a law is a restriction of human conduct. Freedom, by definition, means the absence of human restrictions.

Now, this new garden is on rich soil and there are others in the world who would gladly come and take our freedom from us. Realizing this, we quickly established the Declaration of Independence as the Law of our new land. This is the equivalent of putting a string around our garden to keep foreign armies out. A string isn't enough, so laws were passed allowing us to raise an army and navy for our common defense. This much law is the equivalent of a chain link fence around the garden.

We live in this garden and make our living there. The cost of the army, navy, the president and all our representatives come from us, the people who live in the garden, from our produce and our labor there. All the offices for the politicians are located somewhere on the fence, built by us, paid for by us. The more laws we have, the thicker and taller grows our fence and the less sunshine hits the ground to grow our crops.

We've had "lawmakers" for 200 years, so our fence has become a wall and grown so tall and thick that not enough sun hits the ground for the crops to grow as well as they did and it becomes more difficult to pay for the upkeep of the fence. Every time there is an injustice on the ground of the garden, some agency of government thinks the problem can be improved with more laws, more enforcement and more taxes, more expensive fence, more shadowy government.

40 years ago when I first wrote this over-simplified example of what's wrong with too much government, it would have cost too many government employees their jobs and their votes for a politician to advocate giving sunshine back to the garden by lessening the numbers of laws that were no longer necessary. Now, we hear people begging for government to become smaller and simplified. We hear of the desire for whole sections of the fence to be removed. Education, Labor and other entire programs could be eliminated, thus reducing the size of the government and reducing the demands made on us, the people who till the soil and run the factories.

When this country was new, the founding fathers and mothers had many discussions about the form our government should take. Benjamin Franklin wrote in his journal that he imagined that our representatives would spend an equal time each year removing old laws that were no longer necessary! He also imagined that these people would spend half their time making new laws and repealing old ones, spending the other half of their time at home where the problems could be determined.

As a boy, I remember the great pride a politician took when his name became attached to a new law. Now, before we all perish under the weight of the laws and lawbooks, I'd love to see legislators become just as proud of the laws they eliminated and the problems that might be solved by giving freedom back to the people. Problems can be solved by removing the restrictions that old laws represent. For instance, old laws add 25% to the construction costs of all government buildings alone!

Is it any wonder that many in the garden have grown paranoid and irrationally suspicious of a government that has a yearly budget over a trillion dollars? The shadow of the fence has grown to cover the entire garden now and only those things prosper that grow in subdued light, like greed, lust and rampant materialism. Nowadays, a business man can't move without breaking somebody's law. He needs legal advise to pay his taxes, for goodness sake.

It seems to me now, in these late years of my life, just the elimination of governmental duplication of services would save us enormously.

I remember that as a business man, I would no longer get through a city or county inspection than I'd be faced with the same inspection from the state or the federal government. Little did our founding fathers realize how many laws we'd accumulate at the city, county, state and federal levels during the next 200 years. The time has come to simply remove some of this old weight and let the sunshine of freedom in again. I remember the illustration of 30 years ago concluded that we must reduce the fence around the garden the same way we built it. If we didn't, we people in the garden would angrily tear the fence down. Isn't that what happened in the Oklahoma City bombing? Someone tried to blow a hole in the wall.

I also remember that the hula hoop craze had just spread across the nation. In exactly the same way, the thought of reducing the numbers of laws on the law books could also "catch on." It is only the slightest shift of thinking that we realize that a law is a restriction of human conduct and that freedom is the absence of too much law, not the burial under tons of it. With a little encouragement from high places, it could become fashionable to attempt the solution of problems by the unique act of removing old laws instead of making more. Law unmakers are freedom restorers.

The more laws we have, the larger our government grows. After all, those laws have to be enforced and regulated. We must have judges and lawyers, trials and prisons and enforcement people.

William Samuel -- Woodsong, 1995

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