

WHAT ABOUT RATIONING ENERGY?

Once again the public is being bombarded with political debate over what public policy, if any, should be followed in dealing with energy shortages.

A favorite device of those in government, who have little or no understanding of how to end economic shortages, is to call for distributing the hardship equally so that all citizens suffer together in the spirit of egalitarian misery.

Some politicians would have us believe that rationing is only a short term device to be used until total supply expands. But, as this paper will show, rationing is not only poor short run policy, but also is disastrous in the long run, perpetuating the problem it was meant to alleviate.

Persons who seek rational solutions to problems in economics must be prepared to meet head-on the advocates of rationing of energy, and, for that matter, any rationing system.

Fallacies of Rationing

Rationing is based upon the principle that in times of shortage, the decisions of social planners regarding how much of a good each person should be permitted to buy are superior to the voluntary marketplace where individual buyers and sellers arrive at these decisions. Morally, rationing bans voluntary cooperation between people and substitutes authoritarian control on human behavior.

Rationing is based upon the economic fallacy that the supply of goods is fixed. In time of shortage, increases in price bring forth new supplies to satisfy needs. The use of rationing and price control guarantees that these new supplies will not appear and that shortages will remain.

Rationing is further based upon the fallacy that the demand for a good is constant when, in fact, demand during time of shortage is high because of lower than natural prices. Rationing and price control guarantee that demand will remain higher than natural.

Rationing, like all forms of egalitarianism, is unfair in that it assumes all persons are equal in need for a particular good and prohibits a person with real need from voluntarily increasing his supply. Further, rationing levels all of us to the common average mean, to a depersonalized number in the computer of the social planner.

Effects of Rationing

Every use of rationing in the past has resulted in corruption and scandal. In spite of over 5,000 enforcement agents and the patriotism of a nation at war, rationing during World War II failed to avoid scandal, black market payoffs and corruption of those administering the program and those citizens in need of fuel. Despite severe penalties for violation of rationing laws, within two years after gasoline rationing was instituted the majority of coupons in circulation were counterfeit.

Rationing is a poor substitute for sound public policy. The goal of national leaders should be to end hardship in times of shortage by ending governmental interference with the working of the free market. Instead of ending hardship, we have these proponents of rationing proclaiming, "Let's distribute the hardship equally."

The costs of abandoning the free market are high indeed. Every step this nation takes in the direction of a planned society, a controlled economy, and a regulated people is another step toward betrayal of the essence of the American Revolution.

The abandonment of individual control of the market, and the substitution of bureaucratic and political control of market exchanges, is the prelude to the abandonment of individual decisions in all areas of life—be they moral, personal or religious.

Finally, rationing stands as a testament of those who have given up on people. The essence of the pro-rationing position is this—"We as a society can no longer trust people. People must, in fact cannot, be allowed to deal with each other voluntarily. The answer to all problems must be force, authority, regulation and control."

If this is what the American people want for themselves, then any hope for a free society can be forgotten. For those who want liberty, the threat of rationing is one more opportunity to clearly explain to those who will listen that allowing government to meddle in economic affairs will eventually destroy all freedom.

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A DECADE OF ACHIEVEMENT

Since 1969, S.I.L. activities have been a vital part of the Libertarian movement. A review of these varied activities shows why S.I.L. has been described as a "cohesive link for libertarians".

CONFERENCES: More than one dozen regional conferences have been sponsored by S.I.L. since the first East Coast Conference in Philadelphia in 1969. All of the most highly regarded libertarian spokesmen have appeared at S.I.L. conferences: Murray Rothbard, Nathaniel Branden, John Hospers, Roy Childs, Karl Hess, Robert LeFevre, Tibor Machan, David Friedman. S.I.L. Conferences provided the first opportunities for many libertarians to meet and exchange ideas.

PROJECTS: The first project to achieve nationwide prominence for libertarianism was S.I.L.'s "Census Resistance '70" project. Major publicity resulted from the libertarians' spearheading of the fight for a voluntary census.

The S.I.L. originated "National Tax Protest Day" is now a fixture come April 15th with most libertarian clubs. Every year since 1973, the cry "Taxation is Theft" is brought home to more and more weary taxpayers.

S.I.L. also sponsored an "Anti-Draft Day" in 1973 when it appeared that the mechanism for having a draft would be left in place. In 1979, S.I.L. is in the forefront of libertarian groups working to stop any return to compulsory national servitude.

Building on a theme of "The American Revolution Betrayed", S.I.L. was the only libertarian organization to get deeply involved in an effort to explain the libertarian origins of the Revolution. S.I.L. sailed into Boston Harbor in 1973 at the 200th Anniversary of the Boston Tea Party and dumped "government" overboard. S.I.L. produced a film, "We Won't Get Fooled Again", documenting the betrayal of the Revolution. This film has been shown hundreds of times by libertarian groups.

LITERATURE SERVICES: S.I.L. originated the idea of inexpensive libertarian "issue papers" and, by the end of our first year, had distributed more than 175,000 copies. Today, there are more than 40 different subjects in the issue paper series and distribution has passed the million mark.

OTHER PROJECTS: S.I.L. has made books and magazines available at discount prices, produced the well-received "Bill of Rights—Void Where Prohibited By Law" poster, sponsored parties at conventions, conducted opinion surveys, built a Speakers Bureau, helped campus clubs get started with free literature, and presented a yearly "Phoenix Award" to ten prominent libertarian spokesmen.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF LIBERTARIANISM

By Jarret B. Wollstein

Philosophers have long recognized that the greatest enemy man faces in his search for freedom and prosperity is himself. Having conquered most natural enemies in his environment, man faces extinction or enslavement from his own species. Nuclear war and ecological catastrophe are just two of the more obvious manifestations of the threat created by human irrationality and aggression. More subtle, but just as fundamentally sinister, are the violent and destructive passions of men which impel them to violent crime and authoritarian laws.

For centuries men of conscience have protested the injustices of their societies and sought a better world. All too often their ideals have remained unpursued dreams or been corrupted to create doctrines and institutions of human repression. But despite mistakes, progress has been made, and the search must go on if man is not to regress to the cave. It is the force of man's ideals which impel him forward and libertarianism is one of the most advanced and consistent of those ideals.

Life, Liberty & Property

Libertarianism is a modern philosophy of individual liberty. Libertarianism holds that if man is to prosper and be free, it is the enslavement of his fellows from which he must first be liberated.

The libertarian ideology asserts that every individual has an inalienable right to *his own* life, which he should be able to live as he sees fit, so long as he respects the same right of others. By extension, libertarianism holds that every individual has an inalienable right to the products of his actions, i.e., his justly acquired property, which is morally his to use and dispose of as he sees fit.

Libertarianism holds that man's rights to life, liberty and property are principles of proper social organization which should not be violated by any other individual or group. Thus libertarianism holds that any attempt to take any portion of an individual's services or property from him without his consent is a violation of his rights and a moral abomination, inherently destructive of any free and prosperous society—regardless of whether the aggressor is an individual, a criminal gang or a government.

Libertarians also insist that the same moral principles which apply to individuals apply to social groups as well—that acts which are immoral for private individuals acting on their own authority are equally immoral for social institutions acting with the support of the majority of their society.

Libertarianism supports the rights of individuals to engage in any form of human relationship or association which is peaceful and voluntary, including the free market, trade, voluntary communes, private enterprise and syndicalism. Conversely, libertarianism is opposed to anything that is violent and coercive—a regulated market, state socialism, militarism, the corporate state, theft and war.

Anti-Politics

Libertarianism is politically neither left nor right, liberal nor conservative. Like the political left, libertarians oppose the draft, censorship, war, the military/industrial complex, laws against recreational drugs and police repression. Like the political right, libertarians oppose taxation, anti-trust laws, wage/price controls, and so on. Libertarianism is explicitly *anti-political*.

Libertarian advocates of the free market point out that the present American political-economic system is far removed from their ideal of *laissez faire* capitalism. The free market means no government redistribution of wealth, no subsidies for industry, no minimum wage laws, no government maintained franchise monopolies, and no protection from foreign competition—evils all endemic in America today.

Similarly, libertarian syndicalists have little sympathy with Chinese and Soviet regimes with their tremendous centralization of power in the government. Libertarians seek a society in which individuals are free to run their own lives—not one in which men are ruled either by collusion between big corporations and the government or by edicts of ideologists acting in the name of "the people". It is clear that a libertarian society lies in the future.

The Libertarian Society

There are two main libertarian views of the nature of the society which should replace the present coercive ones: One group, the limited governmentists, hold with novelist-philosopher Ayn Rand that there should be a government whose sole function is the protection of individuals from aggressors. They argue that the best guarantee of justice would be through a state restricted to a police force, court system, and armed forces.

The second major group of libertarians, the anarcho-capitalists, reject government altogether. They argue that since every individual has the same right of action as any other individual, there can be no such thing as a social institution with the unique or final authority to deal with aggressors. They hold that a "limited government" cannot morally prevent other groups from offering the same defensive services. Thus, anarcho-capitalists maintain that social defense should be regarded as a service, and that in any given geographic area there may well exist competing agencies of defense.

With the exception of this difference, both limited-governmentalists and anarcho-capitalists are in complete agreement about the nature of a free society: In such a society, everything from education, to the minting of money, to road construction, to welfare would be voluntary enterprises. Libertarians consider taxation and any other form of involuntary financing immoral, inefficient, and unnecessary.

(Methods of organizing and financing "public services" without government are discussed in detail in a number of libertarian books, including *For A New Liberty*, *The Machinery of Freedom*, *Society Without Coercion*, and *Public Services Under Laissez Faire*.)

Is Libertarianism Practical?

The arguments against libertarianism are almost entirely "practical ones": How could you build roads without eminent domain? Wouldn't the poor and elderly starve without public welfare? How could you defend the country without a tax-supported military? And so on. Detailed and specific answers to all of these questions and many more appear in the many libertarian books and magazines, but one general answer is simply this:

Coercion gives men no special powers or abilities that they do not otherwise possess. All that which is truly worthwhile can be accomplished without aggression. Free men are not idiots or brutes—they do not need governments to force them to provide for their education, their sick, their poor, or for their old age. Historically the greatest advancements in human welfare have been made in precisely those periods with the least governmental regulation of human action.

The omnipotent state is the archaic remnant of tribal war lords and witch doctors; it is the super-parent who tells us that we are not fit to run our own lives. But there comes a time in the life of every man and society when they must leave the stifling safety of a programmed existence, discard the myths of childhood, and venture forth into the world of self-responsible adults. There are, to be sure, risks in abandoning the nursery, but no human development is possible without risk.

As libertarians we say to the world: Wake up and cut the cord. There is a world of infinite pleasure, variety and adventure open to the person with the courage to be free.

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DONALD C. ERNSBERGER



SOCIETY FOR INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY