



## The Forgotten Man

In the last ten years of the 19th century and the first ten years of the present the American republic was thrust into a great drama of American Destiny carried to the far reaches of the world. America breached the trade barriers of Japan and China, and after winning the Spanish-American War, wrenched Cuba and the Philippines from Spain. The Philippines became an American colony and the idea of American Destiny moved strongly across the Pacific Ocean. We witnessed American imperialism; we were told it was our duty to carry the American concept to the world.

We strongly backed freedom for the Philippines, placing at one time as many as seventy thousand troops

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there and later sending ten thousand young American teachers and experts on sanitation, nutrition, tropical medicine, and agriculture to improve living conditions and wipe out disease. This Philippine adventure was a great pivot-point in American history, and as was stated by Richard O'Connor in his book *Pacific Destiny*:

It signaled our determination to gain and hold supremacy in the Pacific and over as much of Asia as our military power could sustain. The consequences of that move have involved us in three wars so far and promise an unending, possibly unavailing conflict on the Asian littoral.<sup>1</sup>

Not all persons approved this stated American notion of world power. One great voice in opposition was a crusty conservative Yale Uni-

versity professor named William Graham Sumner, who based his opposition on humanist grounds. His voice was prophetic because what he said also relates to the title piece of this article. Sumner's reasoning is put this way:

The Forgotten Man, to whom he referred continually in his essays, was not the slum-dweller but the person who paid his bills for what later sociologists would term the disadvantaged. The Forgotten Man of Sumner's canon was the one who "just when he wants to enjoy the fruits of his care, is told that it is his duty to take care of some of his negligent neighbors, . . . but the point now is, that if preaching and philosophizing can do any good in the premises, it is all wrong to preach to the Forgotten Man that it is his duty to go and remedy other people's neglect. It is not his duty. It is a harsh and unjust burden which is laid upon him, and it is only the more unjust because no one thinks of him when laying the burden so that it falls on him. The exhortations ought to be expended on the negligent—that they take care of themselves."<sup>2</sup>

Sumner was saying that the millions of dollars of American wealth and resources spent on military and civil affairs at home and abroad were paid by the Forgotten Man, and that this burden was imposed upon him as a duty. His thesis went beyond application to the bellicose events of his era, since he meant his general theory to be applied broadly to all acts of the state.

So, likewise in the field of political science and sociology, the Forgotten Man is the common man who after working hard and paying his bills and taxes is told by the liberal establishment (oftentimes his government) that it is his "further" duty to become responsible for all the unfortunate persons, institutions, or other entities who, through negligence on their part or for other reasons, look to the government for their support.

Here, for example, is the teen-age girl who becomes pregnant outside of wedlock. In the view of many, if she has no funds for an abortion or for childbirth, these expenses must be paid by the state. And, further, when she goes on welfare she will receive Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) until the child's eighteenth birthday. All of this is to be paid by the state from taxes of the Forgotten Man.

The Forgotten Man is told, also, that his taxes are needed to provide housing for families whose breadwinner fails to provide.

The farmer who produces more grain than the market will absorb at support prices is told by his government that his grain can be stored as collateral for a commodity loan, with the loan proceeds coming from the Federal treasury, and supported by the Forgotten Man's taxes.

The arts and humanities groups (museums, symphony orchestras, theaters, painters, sculptors, writ-

ers, etc.) claim they are entitled to receive—and do receive—millions of dollars of government aid. And all this comes from taxes paid by our Forgotten Man.

He is told that certain categories of citizens—and even non-citizens—are entitled to have legal counsel furnished by the government, and this expense is to be borne by him through his taxes.

He is told that certain classes of citizens are entitled to food stamps, and he must pay for this through his taxes.

Our Forgotten Man is told that when a large national bank in a great city makes ill-advised energy loans that jeopardize the bank's capital structure, the federal government should infuse billions of his tax dollars into that bank in order to save it.

In short, he is advised by liberal spokesmen that all the poor and unfortunate of the land should be taken care of by the government, and that he (the Forgotten Man) should pay for all this. Never mind whether many of the poor and unfortunate became so through their own negligence.

The Forgotten Man is told that besides managing his own life he also should manage others' lives. In that regard the late Leonard E. Read stated, "Managing one's own life is complex enough; managing the lives of others is impossible."<sup>3</sup>

And to support all this government spending again the Forgotten Man is called upon:

He is the Forgotten Man. If we go to find him, we shall find him hard at work tilling the soil to get out of it the fund for all the jobbery, the object of all the plunder, the cost of all the economic quackery, and the pay of all the politicians and statesmen who have sacrificed his interests to his enemies.<sup>4</sup>

### Human Motivation

The Forgotten Man of whom we speak is in fact a very uncommon man in view of the burden cast upon him. He is a man of utmost integrity, and he has been so since civil social experience began. He has searched for certain ends and purposes in life and sought to reach them. He does not welcome all the burden that so many well-meaning people impose on him, since he places first in all his thoughts the provision for his own family's welfare. The history of mankind shows this strong incentive is continually reduced by the state, as well stated by Russell Kirk in his book on Conservatism:

A . . . motive always has been the desire to provide for the welfare of one's own family and heirs; but the assumption by the state of the functions of education, economic management, and responsibility even for foods-supply and housing, has diminished the responsibility of the individual here, while taxation has hacked at the very foundation of the idea of bequest.<sup>5</sup>

Today, as at the turn of the century in Sumner's time, the Forgotten Man is paying the public cost of those who do not pay their share. In the Forgotten Man we behold the principle of dualism present in every person who pays his expenses and also those of the state. "He will . . . accept heavy taxation if he feels it necessary for the maintenance of Society, yet make every legitimate effort to keep his own contribution as low as possible."<sup>6</sup>

This is the same Forgotten Man who during the war years of the nation does all of the fighting and most of the dying. In many of these wars he is told he is fighting for democracy, when in many cases the countries he is trying to save do not know the meaning of democracy.

When we are discussing the rights of our Forgotten Man, we are dealing in the field of civil liberty. In this respect William Graham Sumner ably stated it this way:

The notion of civil liberty which we have inherited is that of *a status created for the individual by laws and institutions, the effect of which is that each man is guaranteed the use of all his own powers exclusively for his own welfare.*<sup>7</sup>

All of history and philosophy tells us that the free citizen in a democracy should be guaranteed the exclusive enjoyment of all that he produces through work. It certainly is not the function of the state to make

men happy; they must do it in their own way, and at their own risk.

### The Oppressive State

For the Forgotten Man to be told by his own government or by other spokesmen that he has a duty to support others who do not support themselves, is to accept dictation by a privileged class that is asserting itself to create an immoral political system. This imposes upon his earnings an ill-defined duty to make others happy. Our Forgotten Man rebels at this duty others cast upon him because he wants the state to be kept within reasonable bounds of power and function. He full well knows that the state has a tendency to become oppressive.

The social doctors focus their attention on a group of people—the poor, minorities, workers—appealing to sympathy and imagination, and devising programs to care for them. They (the social doctors) set in force motion and forces that react throughout the entire fabric of society, and in the furtherance of their grandiose plans ignore the effect upon other members of society. They have developed the myth of a government competent to solve problems. They forget "that the State cannot get a cent for any man without taking it from some other man, and this latter must be a man who has produced and saved it. This is the Forgotten Man."<sup>8</sup>

Their programs thus shift capital from one group of men to another. The men from whom the capital is taken, individually, are the Forgotten Men. This transfer takes from one and gives to another, who performs no productive effort to earn the property that comes his way. The property transferred—usually money—is diverted from productive use. The person who produces this property is our Forgotten Man. This largess brings to mind the illustration of a man who gives a hungry man a fish. The better plan for the small philanthropist to follow here would be to give the hungry man a fishing pole and teach him how to fish. When he is hungry again, he will fish for his meal and not ask for a handout. Sumner phrases the situation in this manner:

There is an almost invincible prejudice that a man who gives a dollar to a beggar is generous and kind-hearted, but that a man who refuses the beggar and puts the dollar in a savings-bank is stingy and mean. The former is putting capital where it is very sure to be wasted.<sup>9</sup>

In the above example the man who placed the dollar in a bank will start a process of the dollar going into the labor market as a demand for productive services. The real party in interest is the man who performs the productive service. He is the Forgotten Man. He is the one who the social doctors never think of when they lay their plans.

The way to keep the state within bounds is to restore to the individual his sense of self-reliance and the control of his private property and right to inheritance:

The conservative is no anarchist; he knows that the just state, kept within reasonable bounds of power and function, is a force for our common betterment; but today the danger is that the state shall become all, quite as oppressive as the danger, in other times, that the state might waste away to nothing.<sup>10</sup>

The state certainly has a proper interest in expanding the opportunities for its free citizens to pursue their happiness. In this free democratic society, of which we speak, the only duty a free man has to other men of his same rank and standing is to render the others respect, courtesy, and good-will; here his duty ends. In other words, what we are saying is that men who have not done their duty to others in the world never can be equal to those who have done their duty tolerably well. The class distinction which we see in a democratic society results from the different degrees of success whereby men have utilized their chances from opportunities placed before them. Sumner, again, says it well: "Instead of endeavoring to redistribute the acquisitions which have been made between the existing classes, our aim should be to *increase, multiply, and extend the chances.*"<sup>11</sup>

If, as a nation, we try to satisfy every demand put forth by the social planners who endeavor to help the "poor," we'll learn that there is no way to meet such a ravenous appetite. We might just as well try to bail out the Atlantic Ocean with a sieve.

At every step in the process of government, we should examine the effect on the Forgotten Man, since on his economic and political health depends the safety and security of our nation.

### —FOOTNOTES—

<sup>1</sup>Richard O'Connor, *Pacific Destiny* (Little-Brown & Co., Boston-Toronto, 1969), p. 258.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>Leonard E. Read, *Meditations on Freedom* (The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc., Irvington-on-Hudson, New York, Feb. 1972), p. 22.

<sup>4</sup>William Graham Sumner, *What Social Classes Owe to Each Other* (The Caxton Printers, Ltd., Caldwell, Idaho, 1978, Eighth Caxton Printing, 1978), pp. 125-126.

<sup>5</sup>Russell Kirk, *A Program for Conservatives* (Henry Regnery Co., Chicago, 1954), pp. 106-107.

<sup>6</sup>Karl Mannheim, *Freedom, Power, and Democratic Planning* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1950), p. 282.

<sup>7</sup>Sumner, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>8</sup>Sumner, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

<sup>9</sup>Sumner, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

<sup>10</sup>Kirk, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

<sup>11</sup>Sumner, *op. cit.*, pp. 144-145.

### Leonard E. Read

THE IDEA that each person has an inherent and inalienable right to life becomes meaningless when a person loses the authority for his own decisions and must act according to someone else's decisions. Unless a person holds the power of self-control, his life is not truly his own. Before a life can be valued for its own sake—and not just as a means to someone else's goal—that life must have its own power of choosing, its own quality, its own dignity. Without such a basis for love, respect, and friendship, the needy person is soon regarded as a puppet or a millstone around one's neck. Unless it is voluntary, even a mother's love in caring for an invalid child cannot exist. Aged persons and others who have come to depend for their survival upon the state's power of confiscation become merely numbers in the confused statistics of political bureaus. Statistics and bureaus have the capacity for neither love nor charity.

We should realize that the end pre-exists in the means. An evil means inevitably leads to an evil result. Related to the thesis under discussion, evil, not good, must come to persons who attempt to benefit from the confiscated property of other persons.

IDEAS ON



LIBERTY



## Protectionism and Unemployment

THERE is a disturbing thing about foreign affairs: they are foreign. They do not conform to the world we admire, which is our own. Foreign matters are viewed with suspicion, yea, even dislike and contempt. Protectionism, which proposes to use the authority of government and its instruments of coercion to restrict trade with foreigners, builds on this psychological foundation.

In the minds of many people the ancient association of foreigner with enemy still lingers. Foreigners are blamed for all kinds of evil, real and imagined. They are censured for being inscrutable and unpredictable in their trade relations, engaging in ruthless competition, gouging their trade partners through prices too high or too low, exploiting their

workers through sweatshop wages and conditions. But above all, trade with foreigners is believed to be most disruptive to commerce and industry, ever changing in composition and structure, requiring painful readjustment.

Protectionists offer instant gains through removal of foreign competition and protection from the pains of readjustment. Appealing to people who do not care to change and others who uphold domestic changes, but are set at odds with foreign changes, they promise peace and profit through legislation, regulation and the use of police power. But despite all the opposition to change, the world is a scene of changes. Today is not yesterday. We ourselves change as do our thoughts and works. Change may be painful, yet ever needful.

In our economic lives we may face important changes that require our

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