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Celebrating the Fourth of July **by Jacob G. Hornberger**

Let's not mince words: The "freedom" that Americans celebrate today is opposite to the freedom that Americans celebrated on, say, July 4, 1890.

Think about it: In 1890, Americans were celebrating a way of life in which there was no income tax, Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, drug war, gun control, or immigration controls. There were virtually no economic regulations, mandatory government schooling (public schooling), or welfare. There was neither foreign aid nor involvement in wars thousands of miles away. There was no paper money or a central bank. Americans and foreigners alike enjoyed the rights of habeas corpus and due process of law.

That is what it once meant to be an American. That is once it once meant to be free. That is the freedom that Americans were celebrating on Independence Day, 1890.

That unusual society was the logical consequence of the central idea that motivated the English colonists living in America to take up arms against their own government. While the Declaration of Independence cited numerous reasons for their decision to revolt, what was different about that document was its expression of the most revolutionary principle ever enunciated in a political document: that the source of people's rights is God, not government. It is impossible to overstate the significance of that simple but profound idea.

Throughout history, people have meekly accepted the notion that their lives, liberties, and property were nothing more than privileges bestowed upon them by the state. Given that mindset, it is not surprising that people never questioned the power of political rulers to arbitrarily arrest and punish them, regulate their peaceful activity, confiscate their property, or conscript them for war.

Each person has been endowed by our Creator with certain talents and abilities, which he has the right to employ, especially in the economic marketplace, in order to sustain and improve his life. He has the right to enter into mutually beneficial exchanges with others and to accumulate the fruits of those exchanges. He has the right to decide for himself what to do with the fruits of his earnings — spend, save, invest, hoard, donate, or even destroy them.

Thus, it makes perfect sense that Americans in 1890 were celebrating a way of life in which there were few or no occupational-licensure laws, economic regulations, income tax, welfare, Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, public schooling, immigration controls, drug laws, or gun control.

Today, “freedom” in America entails a way of life in which people cannot enter into businesses, professions, or occupations without the permission of the political authorities. If one doesn’t receive that permission, he doesn’t engage in that line of work, plain and simple.

Today, the income of the American people is unconditionally subject to the power of the federal government. Sometimes they’re nice and tax us less; sometimes they’re not so nice and tax us more. But make no mistake about it: by having the power to set the percentage of the income tax, the federal government now has ultimate control over how much of people’s earnings they will be permitted to keep.

The government power to regulate economic activity is once again a given, resulting even in the criminal prosecution of some of the country’s most successful economic entrepreneurs.

In the name of political “goodness” and “charity,” the government now has the power to take money from one person in order to give it to another person.

Today, Americans celebrate the “freedom” to be taken care of and controlled by a powerful paternalistic government ... the “freedom” to subject their lives, economic activities, and fortunes unconditionally to omnipotent government control ... the “freedom” to be made into “good” and “compassionate” people through the coercive welfare apparatus of government.

It is a “freedom” that has created a mindset of socialistic dependency among the people, while destroying the self-reliance and “can-do” spirit that characterized our ancestors. It is a mindset that cannot imagine people actually surviving and prospering without the welfare assistance of government.

It is the “freedom” by which government has once again been placed in the sovereign and supreme position in its relationship to the individual and in which the individual has once again been relegated to a subservient role.

We should also not forget that the “freedom” that Americans today celebrate also includes the federal government’s newly assumed power to seize anyone anywhere in the world, including here at home, and jail or execute him without due process of law.

On July 4, 1776, a small band of radical English colonists expressed an idea of liberty that shook the political foundations of the world. What better way to celebrate the Fourth of July, 2003, than to pledge our lives, fortunes, and sacred honor to its restoration?

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