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Congressional Sadists

by Sheldon Richman

Even though April 15 is more than a month and a half away, this is the time of year when people are thinking about and preparing their income-tax returns. So it's a good time to contemplate this particular bit of oppression under which half the adult population labors.

Many people act as though the income tax and the demands it makes on us are facts of nature. Benjamin Franklin said, "In this world nothing is certain but death and taxes," but we ought to acknowledge that these are two quite different phenomena. Taxes are an act of will. Death eventually comes despite any preference to the contrary.

As you sweat out the tax season, bear in mind that identifiable men and women — the members of Congress — inflict this pain on you. They know what you go through. They know the hours you put in and the money you spend. They know that you look frantically for missing receipts just to keep a few more dollars that, after all, belong to you anyway. They know that you fear the hell of an IRS audit. Yet they refuse to stop the torture. They could do it. But they don't — because you only matter around election time, which is long after tax day.

This suggests a modest, short-run approach to tax reform: Move tax day to the day before election day. And for good measure, abolish withholding. Imagine if people trudged to the polls the day after sending fat checks to the IRS. That might bring the incumbents down a notch.

You have to wonder how such a sadistic group of people can call themselves our leaders. Why won't they relieve us from the dastardly income tax? The answer is obvious. They want the large amount of money and the social-engineering powers that only an income tax can provide. Whenever you hear a politician talk about compassion and wanting to make a difference, think of the IRS.

The 19th-century political philosopher Lysander Spooner saw through the pretense as no one has since. He compared the tax authority to a highwayman. But he saw a profound difference between the two. As he wrote in his publication *No Treason*:

The highwayman ... does not pretend that he has any rightful claim to your money, or that he intends to use it for your own benefit. He does not pretend to be anything but a robber. He has not acquired impudence enough to profess to be merely a 'protector,' and that he takes men's money against their will, merely to enable him to 'protect' those infatuated travellers, who feel perfectly able to protect themselves, or do not appreciate his peculiar system of protection.... Furthermore, having taken your money, he leaves you, as you wish him to do. He does not persist in following you on the road, against your will; assuming to be your rightful 'sovereign,' on account of the 'protection' he affords you. He does not keep 'protecting' you, by commanding you to bow down and serve him; by requiring you to do this, and forbidding you to do that; by robbing you of more money as often as he finds it for his interest or pleasure to do so; and by branding you as a rebel, a traitor, and an enemy to your country, and shooting you down without mercy, if you dispute his authority, or resist his demands. He is too much of a gentleman to be guilty of such impostures, and insults, and villanies as these. In short, he does not, in addition to robbing you, attempt to make you either his dupe or his slave.

We can only hope that our politicians one day elevate themselves to the level of a common robber.

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