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*A MULTIPLICITY OF LAWS AS A CAUSE OF
DISORDER.

Everyone will at some time or another in their lives ask the simple question, "Why have a government?" The answer is likewise simple. Human beings, because naturally selfish, and inconsiderate of the rights of others, need restraints. If let alone, the stronger usurp rights and withhold them from the weaker. So after ages of bitter struggle, governments were evolved, organized for the purpose of preserving the peace, and protecting the liberties of the masses from tyranny of officials and private persons.

Governments were not organized for the purpose of dictating to people what to smoke, what to read, and what to say. And individuals do not want such dictation, because it is contrary to common sense and instinct.

To be sure, some state regulation is necessary, but the tendency nowadays is to forget that law has necessary limitations, and that law is observed because it protects liberties. The tendency is to assume that government is arbitrarily supreme, and that liberties are benevolent grants, instead of sacred rights, which it is the government's duty to preserve.

Whenever something is queer or not understood, people demand a law! Whenever something is awry or wrong, people clamor for a law! No matter what the trouble, no matter what the complaint, no matter what the subject, people rush to legislators and expect a miraculous law. So bad is this trait, that editors facetiously, and some seriously, propose

*Speech delivered in Missouri Valley Oratorical Contest.

passing a law against passing laws. This explains in a measure what is wrong with our times. Surely, things are not ideal, but the government is not a panacea, for all ills. Governments cannot make Utopias! The moral fibres and spiritual qualities of man cannot be changed by legislation. It cannot inculcate charity, temperance and love into men's hearts, even by imprisoning the whole population. If the energy and money used to expand the government were brought to bear upon the hearts and minds of men, the world would be much better off, and so would the governments. We need more of education and tolerance, and less of law.

It clearly is not a function of the State to manufacture morality. The rules of conduct universally accepted should be enacted as statutes, in order to preserve the existing morality. But law isn't law when it attempts to create moral standards that are really not standard. The kind of law that is desired and observed is that which sums up public opinion—not that which tries to mold it.

Not only is the function of the State overlooked in the mad obsession for law, but its capacity and stability. Let us reason the matter out. The fewer undesirable laws there are, the more lawful are the people, for there are fewer laws that they are liable to run counter to. The more undesirable laws there are, the more lawless are the people, for there are more possibilities of violation. A corollary to this is that the more individuals with which a law actively interferes, the more lawless they will be. In America, there are more than a million laws on the statute books, thousands of them undesirable. Yet ignorance of the law is held to be no excuse.

Is lawlessness a wonder then? But laws are not violated altogether because they are numerous and unknown.

Lawlessness is contagious. If one person violates a law and is not detected, why shouldn't others, especially if they are not in sympathy with the regulation. And if they successfully violate one law, why not another?

One does not have to be cynical to say with Tacitus that "the multiplication of law measures the decay of the state." Excessive government is invariably followed by contempt for law and dissatisfaction. The laws are not enforced because it is a physical impossibility. The public's conscience may have crumbled.

Recent events in this country are matters of common knowledge. Murder is increasing. Law enforcement, the crying need of the times, is hopelessly weak, weak in direct proportion to the number and complexity of laws to be enforced. People are interfered with on every turn, and taxes are ironically being pyramided to provide the wherewithal for more undesirable government. Never before was disrespect for authority so prevalent, except under similar conditions of excess law and violations of liberty—which history shows were evil.

The revolt against constituted law has reached a crisis. There is no use dodging the fact. Reformers, with lofty ideals, can learn a lesson from a lowly automobile tire. A tire can hold a certain amount of air. One proportion is better than another. But too much, is too much. There is disruption and collapse.

Too much of a good thing has been known to kill. Good intentions are no excuse for ultimate evils. The state machinery is becoming clogged and stuffed by too many departments and bureaus—too many smirking officials and non-working clerks. In addition to being an expensive and vast political machine, it has its attention so devoted to matters ordinarily of private concern, that matters really of public importance are neglected. Furthermore, redundant laws not only complicate and demoralize the state's function, but make for greater dishonesty. The more red tape and the more officials there are, the greater corruption and grafting in office.

Lawmakers should not forget that corruption does not make unpopular laws more satisfactory. The populace is becoming disgusted and resentful. As a result, and it is only human, they are liable to go to the other extreme. The greater the pressure, the greater the recoil. Without exception, the revolutionary orgies in ancient and modern times Asia, North and South America have testified to the fact with the eloquence of the millions of dead and the dying,—with the eloquence of fire and terror, and grief. For liberties have cost too much, and are worth too much, to relinquish meekly. All the tortures of Life, and the agonies of Death, have been undergone by both the old and the young for Freedom's sake. It is therefore fitting that we should look upon the compass of human experience and perceive where we are drifting. There is bound to come a day of reckoning.

In our United States—a complex bureaucracy is being substituted for vaunted Freedom. Paternalism and Standardization are the watchwords of the day. Sumptuary and class

legislation is constantly being squeezed into the body politic. To enumerate all is impossible. Blue Laws of every variety and shade, anti-evolution teaching laws, anti-parochial school laws, anti-cigarette and liquor laws, anti-birth control literature laws, anti-free assembly and speech laws, compulsory Bible reading laws, and until recently a compulsory working law. These laws are failures now and will always be failures, because they are opposed by respectable persons for sound reasons. They are not observed because they strive to mold morality instead of preserving it, the proper function of law.

“Once there was a time when law was respected in this country, but at that time the law was respectable.” Today, here in free America, people are being told by law what to teach, what to drink, what to read. Where will these encroachments have their limitations as well as their functions. yet every day the destructive flame of misdirected government is dissolving the precious snow of Liberty. Vicious precedents are being set daily for more enslaving legislation, all passed under the cloak of good intentions.

But as I have said before, “Good intentions do not justify evils. Some things cannot be changed or forced by law. Some things can be changed in better ways. Some things are impossible of change. For example—few will deny that a universal religion is a sublime, worthwhile ideal, and yet few would tolerate the government if it dictated such a religion. There are some things too private, too personal, too sacred for state interference. There are some things upon which even governments should not intrude.

Human beings have brains and souls. They are not mere machines, automatons that can but respond to tyranny and

intermeddling. The varied impulses and aspirations of the human soul cannot be satisfied when they are repressed by unyielding regulation. Oppressive legislation isn't to be justified because benevolent men are producing it. It is just as contrary to instinct to have the lips sealed and the body bound by well meaning but blundering legislators as by selfish, boasting tyrants. Tyranny is tyranny—no matter what the pretense or what the source. Humans may change, but inherent human nature cannot be changed.

There is no need to recount the struggles of the past against religious and political impositions. Every land has its fields of bones and its remnants of martyrs who fought for rights of man. They were not of one race, religion, or climate. Their common denominator was the ideal of Freedom. For freedom and liberty are as necessary for the happiest existence as air and food.

In Liberty lies man's happiness. Look back to the day when man rose from dust and step by step dragged himself upon the slimy trail of Time. Every step has been a struggle, every footprint has been marked with blood and pressed with pain; every step has been inspired by the spirit of Liberty. Take the dream and ideal of Freedom from the human race—and slowly, but surely, it will crawl back to the dismal dust from which it came.

VICTOR PACKMAN, '25.