

Freedom Matters

We are a free people in a republic, under a constitution which limits the powers of government to those necessary to secure the unalienable rights of each person to their life, liberty and property. We dedicate this paper to saving and preserving our freedom.

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A New Tragedy of the Commons

(based on Garret Hardin's seminal essay, *Science*, 1968)

by
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In England, each village used to have its commons, which was land open to the use of all, including use for the grazing of animals. The tragedy of the commons was its eventual over-use and ruin, as everyone tried to get the most gain from it. So we find that what belongs to all, when it comes time to use it, belongs to no one when it comes time to take care of it.

So, over time, the commons as a pasture mostly ceased to exist; it got converted to private ownership. That significantly improved the care of the land, in general, and worked far better than a commons.

In the history of America (i.e., the United States), land came under federal jurisdiction in vast swaths of "wilderness," and was mostly transferred to private ownership, if not without travail. The development of a social, political and judicial structure of strong private property rights in America is briefly reviewed in Hernando De Soto's milestone book, *The Mystery of Capital*. De Soto advances the compelling conclusion that these property rights were an essential cornerstone of the prosperity which America developed. Lose it, and we become a "Third World" nation again, our people impoverished and struggling.

Yet, America is now engaged in dismantling and destroying its private property rights, starting with, but not limited to, land. We are still so wealthy that, as a nation, we are only beginning to feel the pinch of it, but not to feel it so much that the majority of the population has started to take effective alarm at it.

At the same time, we have created a new kind of commons in America. It is our national prosperity itself. With the advent of the welfare state, most prominently associated with the presidency of Franklin Roosevelt, we threw open the prosperity of the nation to being directly used by whomever could control the

votes in the legislature in order to grant to themselves largesse from the public treasury. The result has been the growth of vast "entitlement" programs, in which both corporations and private citizens have increasingly gone on welfare. The unionization of government employees has furthered the ballooning of welfare.

This has become so endemic in the body politic, the voting population of the nation, that no major political party which does not pander to it can elect controlling majorities of our legislators. The growth of the welfare government has become a force unto itself which sweeps along with it whichever political party comes to power at the federal or state level. It is more rampant at the federal level, which is farther from the control of the voters than is state government.

These past three years, we have seen that the Republican Party, long the bastion of self-proclaimed fiscal responsibility, can feed at the federal trough with the greediest of them. The Republicans, though enacting relatively modest tax cuts, have at the same time enacted vast new entitlement programs, converting ever more of the national prosperity into a fiscal commons, where increasing numbers of citizens are on the public dole. Still, there is no end in sight.

History shows that not even the bankruptcy of the welfare nation seems able to restrain the appetite of its citizens. We have recently seen so in Argentina, poster nation for welfare run amok, which despite its bankruptcy, plunges on into the abyss. Why should they not. They have discovered the International Monetary Fund, one of the arms of our creeping one-world government, and the population of Argentina has now learned that it can graze at will on the international monetary commons.

One bright exception has been the case of Britain, which, under Margaret Thatcher, repealed enough of the welfare state to return to a sustaining measure of prosperity. Will America, its offspring, also finally learn to fence off its national treasury so that it is not a fiscal commons that its citizens can use to its ruin?

Property rights web sites: < <http://www.fairnessinlaw.org/> >
< <http://www.takebackwisconsin.com/> >
<<http://www.PropertyRightsResearch.org>>

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