



Algeria

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GO TO THE ASSEMBLY and listen to the debates on Algeria. You will hear the orators declaiming many fine things about the power and glory of France, about the brilliant future of our gigantic colony in Africa, and about the advantages of sending our surplus population abroad. These magnificent orations always conclude somewhat as follows: "We must vote the necessary 50 millions to construct ports and roads in Algeria, to build houses and to encourage agriculture, and to send emigrants from France to Algeria. These measures will aid the French workingman, encourage native African labor, and stimulate the commerce of Marseilles. It would be profitable in every way."

And, of course, that is true — if you look only at where the money goes and not where it comes from; if you look only at the improvements caused by the spending of tax money, and ignore the improvements that could not be made by the taxpayers because their money was taken from them.

True enough, one can see the new house that is built in Algeria with tax money. One can also see the new harbor in Barbary and the increased commercial activity in Marseilles. And the number of French workers going to jobs in Algeria can actually be counted. But there is another side to the picture *that is not seen*.

The 50 millions gathered by the State cannot be spent by the taxpayers. Thus an accurate accounting demands that the benefits claimed by the State should be balanced by the harm done to the citizens. The taxpayers would have used their money to repair their fences, fertilize their fields, buy needed tools, improve their homes, improve their diets, purchase more clothing, educate their children better, contribute more to charity, and so on. Those are the things that *cannot be seen* because the tax money sent to Algeria prevented their coming into existence.

True enough, there are more jobs in Africa because of the spending of the 50 millions. But *what is not seen* is that the absence of the

50 millions from France caused at least an equal loss of work for the local gardeners, carpenters, blacksmiths, tailors, and others. In addition to this decrease in domestic labor, the taxpayers were also deprived of the pleasure that would have accrued to them from spending their own money as they wished. When we look at Algeria and the things that can easily be seen, we should also remember these things that *cannot be seen*.

Consider This!

Much is expected from the future prosperity of Algeria. Let us hope for the best. But when it is pointed out to me that each colonist sent to Algeria means an improvement in the conditions of the workers left in France, I must ask how that can possibly be true. The Minister of War informs us that it costs the State 8,000 francs for each person transported to Algeria. Now it is certain that these poor individuals could live very well in France on a capital of 4,000 francs. How is it an improvement to the French people to

deprive them of the services of one man and the means of subsistence for two men?

Generally speaking, it is not a good idea to use tax funds to establish enterprises. Here is why: Justice always suffers in some degree. The taxpayer who has labored to earn his hundred sous is at least disappointed that the tax collector takes them from him to give to another. The State must offer good reasons for this. But, actually, the State gives a poor excuse when it says, "With these hundred sous, we shall employ workmen." The taxpayer can truthfully reply, "With the hundred sous, I would employ them myself." This claimed encouragement of labor is a delusion. Whatever the State does in this direction by public spending, the private spending of the money would also have done. Therefore, the interest of "labor" is not a valid issue in the case.

Now it is an entirely different matter when the State says to the taxpayer, "We take your hundred sous to pay the policeman who saves you the trouble of providing for your own personal safety; to pave the streets that you use every

day; to pay the judge who helps to protect your property and your liberty; to maintain the soldier who protects our frontiers." My guess is that the taxpayer will pay for all that without hesitation.

But it is another thing entirely when the State says to him, "We take these hundred sous so that we may give you a bonus if you cultivate your fields well; or to teach your son something that you have no wish that he should learn; or to build a cottage in Algeria — in which case, we must tax you another hundred sous every year to support the worker who lives in it, and another hundred to maintain the soldier to protect the worker, and another hundred to pay the general to watch the soldier," and so on. In this case, I think I hear the poor taxpayer exclaiming, "This government seems to be a system of legalized robbery!"

A Dislocated Population

Since these governmental expenditures merely change labor without increasing it, another serious objection can be raised against them: "When workers are arbitrarily shifted about, the nat-

ural distribution of population in the nation is disturbed. If the 50 millions are left in the possession of the taxpayers, labor would be encouraged throughout all the hamlets and towns of France. Since the taxpayers are everywhere, they spend their money among all kinds of workers and industries. But when the State collects the 50 millions and spends it in one place, it attracts to that place much labor. This increases the number of homeless workers. It creates a floating population that is out of place. I also suspect that this displaced population may become dangerous when the fund is used up.

This feverish activity in Algeria attracts the attention of all. The resulting construction and new jobs can be seen by anyone who looks. The people applaud the beauty and simplicity of the government's plan, and expect more and more. But they fail to realize that there is a reverse side to the picture, a side that is not good, *a side that they do not see.* • • •

Translated and condensed by Dean Russell from *Oeuvres Choieses de Frederic Bastiat*, Volume 2, pp. 379-383. Paris: Guillaumin, 1863.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Governmental grants or loans to help develop the economy of a "backward" or undeveloped country are not new. This essay by economic journalist Frederic Bastiat (1801-1850) was originally published in connection with a debate in the French government over such a program. Bastiat's constant refrain, here as well as in other essays, was to urge his readers to consider not only "what is seen," in this case the government's aid to Algeria (Barbary), but also "what is not seen," i.e. the things the taxpayer cannot buy or produce because he is deprived of the money the government takes from him to spend on subsidies to others. This essay was part of an 1850 pamphlet entitled "Ce Qu'On Voit et Ce Qu'On ne Voit Pas," or as we would say in English, "That Which is Seen, and That Which is Not Seen."