



“Too much government? Just what would you cut out?”

THOSE WHO SEEK to promote liberty by limiting the power of government often are “floored” with a tricky question, “Very well! Just what would you eliminate?”

It would take a lifetime to answer that question in detail. But it can be answered on principle, leaving some of the difficult details to the questioner. For example:

“I would favor the rescinding of all governmental action — Federal, state, or local — which would interfere with any individual's freedom:

... to pursue his peaceful ambition to the full extent of his abilities, regardless of race or creed or family background;

... to associate peaceably with whom he pleases for any reason he pleases, even if someone else thinks it's a stupid reason;

... to worship God in his own way, even if it isn't “orthodox”;

... to choose his own trade and to apply for any job he wants — and to quit his job if he doesn't like it or if he gets a better offer;

... to go into business for himself, be his own boss, and set his own hours of work — even if it's only three hours a week;

... to use his honestly acquired property in his own way — spend it foolishly, invest it wisely, or even give it away. Beyond what is required as one's fair share to an agency of society limited to keeping the peace, the fruits of one's labor are one's own;

... to offer his services or products for sale on his own terms, even if he loses money on the deal;

... to buy or not to buy any service or product offered for sale, even if refusal displeases the seller;

... to agree or disagree with any other person, whether or not the majority is on the side of the other person;

... to study and learn whatever strikes his fancy, as long as it seems to him worth the cost and effort of studying and learning it;

... to do as he pleases in general, as long as he doesn't infringe the equal right and opportunity of every other person to do as he pleases.”

Unless a devotee of statism specifies which of the above liberties he would deny the individual, he implicitly approves the free market, private property, limited government way of life.

If, on the other hand, he insists that the individual should be deprived of one or more of the above liberties, then let him defend his position. Trying to present his case will more surely convince him of his error than any reform talk a libertarian can contrive. Let him talk himself out of his own illiberality!

In short, instead of attempting to explain the thousands upon thousands of governmental activities you would eliminate, let the author of the tricky question explain just one peaceful activity he would deny to the individual. Isn't this putting the burden of proof where it belongs?

LEONARD E. READ