



### "You do believe in majority rule, don't you?"

THIS popular cliché implies that any act of government is proper if authorized by a majority, and that to think or act otherwise constitutes un-American activity. It endorses the idea of *rule*, and deals exclusively with *who* should exercise it.

If the word *rule* means what the dictionary says—...reign; control; to have authority over; govern; direct: as the king *ruled* the country...

giving the picture of running other people's lives, then I, for one, reply unequivocally, "No! I do not believe in majority *rule*." I do not believe in *rule*, whether its sanction derives from a majority or rests upon the whims of a despot. I do not believe in the Divine right of majorities any more than in the Divine right of kings. Government, regardless of how constituted, has no right of control that does not pre-exist as a natural right in the individuals whose agency government is.<sup>1</sup>

What rights of "authority over" others does any individual possess or, to bring it down to cases, what moral title do I have to *rule* you? The answer, when viewed in magnitudes we can grasp, is self-evident: I have no right at all to *rule* you, nor has any other person or combination of persons—even 51 or 99 per cent—or any agency such persons may contrive. One must either agree with this conclusion or explain where any king or any majority gets its right to wield any "authority over" others.<sup>2</sup>

This suggests that there is no moral sanction for *rule*, in the "authority over" sense—the kind of *rule* which is more and more practiced in the U.S.A. True, any individual has a moral right to defend his life, his livelihood (extension of life), and his liberty (means to life) against attack by others. But such strictly defensive actions against aggression cannot be called *rule*; it is semantic nonsense to say that you *rule* another when you only stop him from taking your life, livelihood, liberty. It is *rule*, however, when you con-

trol or have "authority over" the life, livelihood, liberty of another.

There is no meaningful difference of opinion among persons of a truly liberal mien concerning natural rights of individuals: We concede that no one of us has a natural right to *rule* another; we concede that everyone has a natural right to protect his life, livelihood, liberty. We also concede that there is no implication of *rule* or "authority over" others when we limit ourselves to protection against aggression.

When thinking in individualistic terms, nearly all of us remain on solid ground; we think straight. But, for some illogical and indefensible reason, millions of us accord rights of *rule* to a majority while denying that even the germ of such rights exists in any citizen. This, of course, is untenable unless a universal or natural right, not existing in individuals, is born when individuals combine into a majority.

Faculties such as wisdom, responsibility, a sense of justice, moral nature, and conscience are exclusively the acquisitions of individuals, and it is only in individuals that they grow and mature. Further, these faculties are most faithfully reflected in individual action, and tend to lose character as individuals combine to act as majorities. To grasp this point, reflect on how little any member of a mob feels responsible for the mob action. How slight is our own sense of responsibility for any majority action in which we have shared: a local or national vote, a resolution of an association or the stand of a committee! For instance, hardly one among us, acting individually, would forcibly take funds from millions of people throughout the nation to finance the local hospital or other pet projects; our conscience would not permit any such atrocity. Yet, how easily we commit precisely the same evil when, acting as members of associations or committees, we recommend that this be done.<sup>3</sup> Whenever

<sup>1</sup>The term "natural right" is in flux; it seems to have no precise meaning. I use it to mean a morally inalienable right, a right I can rationally concede to everyone; in short, a right I can universalize.

<sup>2</sup>There are numerous unconvincing explanations as to where rights are derived in addition to majority rule: racial supremacy; Divine right of kings; conquest; might makes right; Plato's "superior intelligence"; succession by heredity; and other excuses for some to *rule* others.

<sup>3</sup>For further readings on the fallacy and dangers of majority rule, see "The American System and Majority Rule," by E. A. Opitz; my "Conscience of the Majority," or "On That Day Began Lies" (reprints available from FEE on request); *The Crowd* by Gustave Le Bon (New York: The Viking Press, 1960, \$1.45 paperbound); "To Communism: Via Majority Vote," Chapter III, Vol. I in *The Admiral's Log* by Admiral Ben Moreell (FEE, \$1.00 paper).

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a sense of personal responsibility is removed from actions, the actions tend toward irresponsibility. This is a truism.

A majority does not act; only individuals act. A majority is only a numerical count of individual actions. A count—51 per cent or whatever—is as devoid of wisdom, justice, responsibility, moral nature, conscience as is eeny meeny miney mo. Majority *rule*, per se, is no more founded in moral, ethical, juridical principles than is any other statistic. Not only is majority *rule* a senseless concept, a shibboleth of our collectivistic times, but it is a degrading concept: individuals act less responsibly when thinking of a majority as responsible for their actions than when holding themselves responsible for their actions. This is an observed fact.

To be sure, reliance on a majority of individual choices as a means of selecting the guardians of our life, livelihood, liberty is at least a theoretical safeguard against the guardians becoming rulers. But if the theoretical safeguard is to be made operative, it is required that these choices be founded on an understanding that no person, or any combination of persons, is qualified to *rule* and, also, that the choices be an accurate reflection of this understanding. Short of such comprehension and a general dedication to follow it faithfully, one excuse to *rule* or to ride herd over people is as weak as any other. Numerical supremacy is no more valid than racial supremacy, or plain brute force.

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