

BLUCE - THE COMMUNITARIAN CASE FOR TAXES. - CARTER
CAN WE GET THESE IDEAS INTO TALKING PTS?

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Yours, Mine, Ours—Taxes Cover All

'Tax Freedom Day' is a
conservative canard; what we
pay is a mutual investment.

Monday is, in some quarters, "Tax Freedom Day," the first day of the year that, supposedly, your wages are your own, not someone else's. This conservative invention, which has been around since the 1950s, is based on the amount of wages one must earn to cover the current year's tax bite. This year, as in the past few years, the first "tax-free" day comes on the 123rd day of the year. "That is a long time to wait for emancipation," William F. Buckley Jr. has commented.

Emancipation is just the word for it. The concept of Tax Freedom Day is based on the erroneous modern belief in complete personal independence—the notion that we are separate atoms that form no compounds.

Without question, some of the money collected from us as taxes and spent collectively goes to foolish, needless purposes. But the fact is—and always has been throughout human existence—that some things require us to act together. In the modern world, we pay for these things through taxes.

Tax Freedom Day is meant to indicate that it is only what someone earns after that date that goes to meet his or her needs and wants, that everything a person makes until that day goes to others. ("It's your money, not theirs," Ronald Reagan told Americans in 1981. "You earned it, they didn't.") This is nonsense. What I spend on my own goes to me, but what I pay in taxes goes not to them, but to us. It is a shame so few among us any longer think in terms of "us" that we fail to understand this.

There are two ways in which a person can spend his or her money to meet his or her needs or wants: separately or together with others. Taxes collected by various levels of government provide for our national defense, highways, schools, police, parks, retirement pensions, environmental protection and cleanup, medical research, technological advances and hundreds of other things that fall into one of two categories: things that we cannot do separately or things that we have concluded we can do better and more efficiently together than as separate "I's." It is a rare conservative who seeks to purchase health insurance outside of a group.

There is room for debate about which things belong in these categories. But once we have decided on what we need to do together, the only responsible next step is

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to agree that we must pay for these necessary things. The payment should be based on a fair, equitable system that calls on those who have the most to bear a larger portion of the burden. But all of us have an obligation to contribute to what we need.

The concept of complete "independence" is literally inhuman. The only creatures that truly need no other member of their own species are those that reproduce asexually. So long as members of a species are undifferentiated in terms of function, they can be genuinely independent. Egoism is the natural philosophy of amoebas (who get along nicely without taxes), but it is unnatural for complex social animals—most of all for humans.

Humans have created more complex societies than have any other species. Our divisions of function and labor define us as interdependent. The more complex our societies become—the greater the division of function and labor—the more we must cooperate. Because we have divided what is necessary for survival, we are obliged to come together.

Oddly, though, as we have created ever more complex, interdependent societies, many of us have simultaneously adopted an ideology of full independence. That ideology has become more popular as it has become more inappropriate.

Human nature is an amalgam of selfish and social motivations. This means that our basic needs cannot be satisfied in a system that ignores the individual, such as communism, or in one that pretends that each individual is entirely independent, which is what the Tax Freedom Day "conservatives" desire. Those who see taxation as theft understand why communism cannot work, but they fail to comprehend that pure egoism is just as inhuman.

Taxes are the dues we pay as highly interdependent, social creatures. None of us wants to pay more of them than is necessary; but once we have decided what is necessary for us to do together, we must realize that paying for these things does not constitute having our money stolen from us.

We pay taxes because every day is actually an interdependence day.

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