

## How Free is Freedom?

SOMEBODY should make a factual study of the relation between the amount of their production which peoples have been forced to contribute toward the maintenance of their respective States and the degree of individual freedom which these States have permitted the peoples to enjoy.

Contemporary history indicates that there is an inverse ratio between taxation and freedom. In totalitarian States, where the identity of the individual has been merged in the mass, the right to private property of any kind is at the sufferance of the political power. Taxation is no longer a means of raising revenue; what is vouchsafed to the individual is at the expense of total production, which in principle is the property of the State. Even where private property is allowed, the permission is granted only when the State is best served; and it may be abrogated when public ownership seems more desirable to the predatory committee in charge.

The point is that in the totalitarian countries the complete absorption of production by the State has been accompanied by the complete disappearance of individual freedom. The object of the study suggested would be to show whether gradual increase in the tax burden is likewise accompanied by a gradual curtailment of the freedom which constitutional forms are supposed to safeguard.

The thesis can well be maintained in logic. If the premise that man belongs to himself is accepted, then it follows that the product of his labor belongs to him alone. Any forcible taking of this product, whether by another individual or a community of individuals, is more than robbery; it is a denial of the basic premise of his existence. Once infringement on his property right is accepted as a principle, the right to existence transfers from himself to those who have acquired right in his property. Thus taxation is in principle a denial of human rights. It works out that way in practice.

These thoughts on the relation between taxation and freedom come to mind as we read of the stupendous sums which our government is appropriating for defense, and the prospect of considerably more which will be expended. These expenditures will be met by new conscriptions of labor products.

A contemplated change in our income tax law will increase by 2,000,000 the number of workers who must contribute to the cost of the war machine. But this is merely an omen. In England even a newsboy earning five dollars a week is subject to an income levy, besides paying sales taxes.

We leave it to statisticians to estimate how much of the total production of the nation will be absorbed in this and future generations by the expense now being incurred. Our present concern is the possible extinction of individual freedom which this burden portends.

Will the American State find it necessary to suspend or abrogate the hard-won civil liberties—freedom of speech and assemblage, for instance—when dissatisfaction with the depressed economy begins eventually to assert itself? Will the curtailment of production which follows in the wake of taxation, and the consequent lower living standard, result—*at the demand of the economically enslaved*—in the totalitarian idea of life?