

# A Word With You

"FOR THE greater part of history," writes George Schwartz in the London Sunday Times, "government has shown itself a liar, a thief and a cad, and with the vastly increased scope of government this malignancy is enhanced by ignorance and maladministration. There have been interludes of civilized government, but they are rare, and you can pass a whole lifetime without experiencing one. There is no remedy against this disease of government. It is the incurable pox of humanity."

We have to admit the truth in this jeremiad. But the most distressing thing about it is that it leaves us nothing to do but wail. Is there nothing else to do?

Let us consider some alternatives that have been preached, and even practised:

*Withdraw from government (and society), physically and mentally.* This is the desert island solution. But it's only for stout-hearted misanthropes and most of us don't qualify.

*Withdraw mentally but not physically.* Be in the world but not of it, as St. Paul advised the early Christians. But eventually the Christians inherited the Establishment and started the nasty business all over again.

*Fight it.* This was the anarchist solution. Their idea was to get rid of government by getting rid of the heads of state—a laudable but misplaced

effort. Every time they succeeded, we got more, not less government.

*Reform it.* This possibility, of course, is what keeps our quiet desperation from going berserk. Mr. Schwartz, however, might remind us that after all kinds of reform the pox keeps coming back.

But one reform that deserves another look is this: *make government competitive.*

The main trouble with government is not its tyranny and wickedness so much as its monopolistic character, even when it's well-intentioned. The main cause of the indolence and insolence of office is quite simply that there is nothing against which to measure results. There is no competition. The remedy is to make it possible for a housewife to yell, "I'll go to the government across the street!"

We'd certainly make the right start if we had a public revenue system whereby government was paid only for wanted services satisfactorily rendered in the eyes of the consumer who paid for it. This, you know, is none other than the public collection of economic rent. Decentralized government would make possible the competition across the street. And more private services competing with public services would be a good shot in the arm against that pox.

Are you listening, Mr. Schwartz?

—Robert Clancy

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The Henry George News, published monthly by the Henry George School of Social Science, 50 E. 69th Street, New York, N.Y. 10021, supports the following principle:

The community, by its presence and activity, gives rental value to land, therefore the rent of land belongs to the community and not to the landowners. Labor and capital, by their combined efforts, produce the goods of the community—known as wealth. This wealth belongs to the producers. Justice requires that the government, representing the community, collect the rent of land for community purposes and abolish the taxation of wealth.

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