

LIBERTY vs. GOVERNMENT & EMINENT DOMAIN

For centuries governments have condemned, demolished and confiscated land from their citizens. It is not too much of a surprise to hear of stories of people losing homes, stores and businesses to an ever increasing government. However, when such a violation of human rights hits a friend or neighbor in a local community, almost everyone gets angry and up-set while asking in a state of mild shock, *How could this happen here?*

One recent example of government confiscation is seen in the plight of Cid Derry's Shell Shelter in Fullerton, California. Beginning in early 1979, the Derrys discovered indirectly that the *redevelopment* officials in Fullerton wanted to condemn Derry's shop to break a leasing contract scheduled to expire in three years. After months of desperate attempts to discover who was trying to condemn and seize his property, Derry was finally invited to a city council hearing.

The city of Fullerton, acting similar to a real estate broker, is currently considering a plan to confiscate through eminent domain, Derry's family-owned shop to allow for the expansion of the Bank of America. It would appear that if Bank of America cannot get the land it wants through voluntary agreement, then the power of government must be brought in. So much for the free market.

More is involved in the Derry's case than government seizure of private land. What is at issue is voluntarism vs. authoritarianism, freedom vs. slavery.

What else could freedom imply then to say that each person has absolute sovereignty over their peaceful actions and thought. That is, each individual owns themselves outright.

But when government demands without free choice that a person must surrender his property, land or contract, that person becomes a slave. It is interesting to note that the American Civil War did not abolish slavery. The new amendment to the Constitution after the Civil War only made it illegal for one individual to own another individual. In other words, private ownership of another human was made unconstitutional. However, the new amendment did not outlaw public slavery. That is, the masses or government could still make slaves of its citizens. If this were not true, then, the government could not seize land (eminent domain), seize money (taxes) or seize people (the draft). Remember, the Southern slaveholder could at will take the life, liberty and property of his slaves.

The important thing to remember is that either people have rights to life, liberty and property or they do not. If an ordinary citizen were to confiscate his neighbor's land for the good of the community or Bank of America, he would most likely be arrested, convicted and jailed. Why do governments get away with stealing citizens' property? Why the double standard?

We have been fooled into believing that government protects citizens from thievery and other crimes. As it turns out, the biggest criminal is the coercive power of government. As Will Rogers and Mark Twain often said, *No one is safe while Congress is in session.* The people in government will enact laws to take everything the citizens owns, even his very life, if the opportunity arises.

It is the libertarian approach which states - *the government is not the solution--it is the problem.* To the libertarian, governments should never be in a position or authority to legally or illegally steal any form of personal property or liberty from individuals. And until such authoritarian ideas like eminent domain are abolished, pitiful cases similar to the Derrys will continue with greater frequency.