

GOVERNMENT PROTECTION?

Combining a market like protection with the authoritarian mechanism of politics has the same results as mixing oil and water. The mixture leads to abuse and corruption because the public police agency enjoys a monopoly for protective service in a certain geographical area. Apparently, government refuses to allow free competition in protective services because few citizens would voluntarily purchase the type of protection the government presently offers.

A good example of abuse by government policing agencies appeared in an Associated Press news story which reported that "all 15 police officers in Robbins, Illinois were fired amid charges of armed robbery, burglary and car theft" (March 7, 1978). The news story further reported that this was not the first time the police of this Chicago suburb of 9,600 have been accused of shakedowns, thefts and assaults against citizens. Associated Press reported that, "The entire force was suspended in 1970 after two people were shot to death by police."

The village trustees voted 3-1 to fire the police force. Douglas Polsky, attorney for the village, said that, "Evidence was not inventoried, bond money and narcotics have disappeared, there have been a large number of brutality complaints, and police have been accused of armed robbery, burglary and car theft." Polsky said police have neglected to respond to calls and have failed to testify in court.

"Our jail had to be closed because it was not meeting the minimum standards, the men are not well trained, there have been fights between police and between police and citizens," Polsky added.

"No files are maintained, a gun shop in the village has declared itself off-limit to our police and four of our policemen don't even have driver's licenses."

As remarkable as it may seem, other communities have similar problems. They are perhaps not as extreme as the Robbins' incident, but it does give cause to consider alternative means to improve protective service for every citizen.

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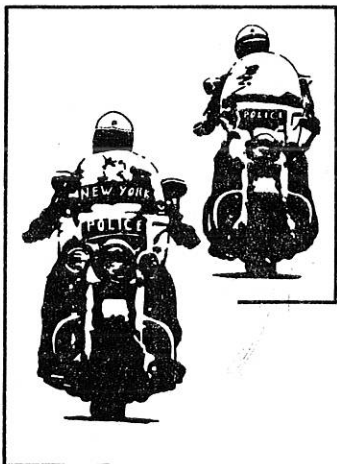
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THE CASE FOR PRIVATIZING PROTECTIVE SERVICES



BY JIM GALLAGHER

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THE LIBERTAS STATEMENT

We, as libertarians, affirm: That full individual liberty is impossible in any society other than a voluntary one that aggresses upon no one.

That men and women require the full and independent use of their own judgement in order to survive at an optimum level, and therefore have a natural right to do their own thing, providing that they do not physically harm or coercively restrict another individual's life, liberty or property.

That everyone is exclusively sovereign, and is a slave to no one.

That the individual is best served by society when he or she is free from the forcefully imposed controls of others, acting alone or in concert (as a government).

That all forms of coercion, aggression and fraud are always immoral.

That the only system consistent with personal freedoms in the economic arena is one that does not interfere with free trade between consenting individuals.

THEREFORE, we, as libertarians, resolve to oppose all forms of aggression by any State. Government, self-appointed savior, individual, or association of individuals. We further resolve to oppose taxation, conscription, or association domain, laws which create victimless "crimes," and all programs forced onto individuals without their consent. It is time that the chains of authoritarianism in economics and morally be broken. Individual rights and coercion cannot co-exist. Liberty cannot be compromised, and we will settle for no less than freedom in our time.

(adopted on May 5, 1973)

THE
CASE FOR
PRIVATIZING PROTECTIVE SERVICE
By Jim Gallagher

"Very few crimes are committed in the presence of police."

Robert LeFevre
1978

THE FUNCTIONS OF PROTECTIVE SERVICES

Human beings in organized societies have naturally specialized the function of self-defense. So that individuals may go about their affairs without having to commit large amounts of effort and resources to protection of their life, limb and property from predators (human and non-human), we arrange for trusted agencies to act in our behalf when we become subject to aggression. Unfortunately, the agencies charged with the defense duties have all too often turned out to be the tyrants of history. So it is (and always has been) with police agencies of the State.

PUBLIC PROTECTION SERVICE-THE PROBLEM

Very few of us are satisfied with the services received from our various police departments. Coupled with apparent impotence when faced with criminals, police systematically harass innocent citizens for driving faster than some arbitrary speed, using substances classed as "illegal," selling the same substances, selling and buying sexual or sex-related services, gambling, or providing a vast array of products and services without government permission. Further, we are presented with enormous expenditures and taxes for these same harassments.

The citizen feels impotence because there seems to be no alternative available. Why must this be? Police departments are rewarded where their greatest successes are. The easiest "successes" available to police are those areas where they encounter the least resistance and skill. The "speeder" is easy prey to an armed officer with \$40,000 worth of equipment. The difficulty in arresting the prostitute or the pot-smoking worker is minimal and police departments allocate large amounts of resources and personnel to the area where they can show "results."

The adult-service-providing bookstore proprietor is "easily" hounded from pillar to post because he must operate visibly. Meanwhile, the true crime rate, that is, crime of property and violence, soars and the poor suffer the most. This has come to be regarded as "highway justice."

The most persuasive influence on our society by the police comes at the hands of these modern-day "highwaymen." It is changing the way the people regard their "protectors." The barrage of TV propaganda (CHIPS, THE ROOKIES, etc.) is a conscious attempt to neutralize the natural resentments people feel. Children in public schools are taught to accept these injustices as "necessary" to public order. Students of history will recognize these tactics from accounts of life in Nazi Germany in the Thirties.

PRIVATE PROTECTION SERVICE-A SOLUTION

The missing element in acquiring satisfactory protection services seems to be the absence of the free market. If the user could choose from whom to buy, the seller of these services would be forced to satisfy their customers or perish. Are there not private security agencies on the market? Yes; however, they do not have the advantage of a coercive tax base from which to control the market. They are also prohibited from those activities which do not constitute protection from crimes against persons or their property. Quite correctly, all should be prohibited from such activities.

CASE HISTORY-MANAGUA, NICARAGUA

The "Guardia Nacional" of Nicaragua is the State-run police agency in the Central American country of Nicaragua. This agency is well-armed and is also the army. The army is loyal to the dictator of Nicaragua, General Anastasio Somoza (1979). It is composed mostly of uneducated and poorly paid peasants and corrupt officers who augment their small salaries with graft and special privileges. Protection of property and person is given only to the influential few.

In poor and lower-middle-class neighborhoods the residents formed local committees to provide for their own protective services. Guards were stationed every two blocks in each direction, and the guards' salaries were paid by those residents within one block of the guard's station. The guards carried a flashlight, a whistle, a night stick, and if he could afford one, a handgun.

At prescribed intervals these guards would signal their counterparts two blocks away to show all was well. In the event of an intrusion, the guards would rouse the residents or run the intruder(s) off, whichever seemed prudent. The crime rate was very low in that area. The price/performance ratio was unmatched by anything that could be provided by the government-operated protective services.



CASE HISTORY-PARADISE ISLAND, BAHAMAS

The intrusion of the State on the private lives of its citizens is yet minimal in the Bahamas, although it is getting worse. There are, as yet, no taxes on income aside from a social security tax amounting to a maximum of \$10 per month. Government funding is mostly provided by custom duties.

The police force is primarily a group of attractively-dressed policemen who direct traffic and pose for tourists' photographs. All serious protective services are provided by private companies. Paradise Island is a complex of hotels and resort facilities including a high-income casino. All police-related activities are provided by Security Services, Ltd.

ONE OF THE BEST RECORDS

The guards are mostly semi-retired men and women of high moral caliber on Paradise Island, who earn not only a supplement to their retirement incomes, but supplement their sense of self-worth as well. Their equipment includes inexpensive Rambler Hornets, and weapons are carried only for armored and high-risk services.

The resources of this company are limited to 60 or 70 guards, a few vehicles, three or four administrative people and a guard captain. These resources are sufficient to serve 25 to 30 companies as well as Paradise Island Ltd. Since they have taken responsibility for the protective services for the island, they have had one of the best records in the world for low incidence of theft, rape and assault in a tourist area. They enjoy the flexibility of providing varying levels of service according to the value placed by the customer on security in a given area.

By way of contrast, theft and assault are becoming a major problem on the main island of New Providence, which also depends heavily on tourism.

A FREE MARKET ALTERNATIVE

What can be done?

It can be seen that the quality of services a protective agency will provide will depend on whether the user has the option to secure another agency in the event that the present supplier is in some way unsatisfactory. Users of public service are required to pay for the service whether they use them or not. A step in the direction of more satisfactory protective services might be to place services provided by the local government on a completely self-supporting basis in competition with privately provided services. This way the user could contract for whatever level of services he or she required.

Ultimately, it is apparent that the government-provided services will lose adherents because of their innate inability to compete on an equal basis with companies committed to making a profit, or other voluntary organizations such as co-ops and neighborhood self-protection associations.

Jim Gallagher, who ran for California State Assembly in 1978 on the Libertarian Party ticket, lived in Nicaragua for four years.