



IRS Scandals? The IRS Is the Scandal

It is now well known that the Internal Revenue Service discriminated against conservative and Tea Party groups — i.e. the enemies of Barack Obama and his party. The IRS's abuse of power is being treated as a "scandal."

But it is not a scandal.

And while there is no law to which Obama wouldn't resort in order to advance his "transformative" agenda, it would be a grave mistake for anyone to think that abuses of this kind are peculiar to his administration.

The point is this: It is of the very essence of an agency like the IRS to abuse the vast power at its disposal, for both in quantity and quality, the existence of that sort of power is itself an abuse.



The IRS, in other words, is inimical to liberty. Its very existence is a scandal to a liberty-loving people.

First, the IRS is an agency of the *federal government*.

American liberty consists in a wide dispersion or *decentralization* of power and authority. More specifically, at least as our Founders conceived it, the federal government is a *federal* — as opposed to a *national* — government precisely because the individual states are regarded as sovereign.

Yet the IRS is just one signifier, albeit a profound one, of the ominous power that the federal government has managed to annex to itself since the time of the Founding. It is emblematic of the fact that it has long ago subverted its federal character, that it can run roughshod over the states.

Second, the IRS has the authority to collect, not just taxes, but taxes on *income*. When we consider the implications of this, it is nothing less than bewildering — and nothing more than tragic — that a once liberty-loving people could have ever permitted such an abomination to have come into existence.

The money a person legally earns is *his*. There is no morally conceivable justification, none whatsoever, for anyone else to touch one cent of his earnings without his consent. And there is certainly no justification for allotting anyone, like the IRS, the authority and power to confiscate a person's wages *before* he sees one dime of them.

There is no liberty unless property is dispersed wide and far. And it is only under a set of arrangements in which individuals are permitted to acquire as much property as their talents and good fortune enable that this situation can be secured.

In short, liberty presupposes the old Lockean notion of "self-ownership."

But the income tax, to a far greater extent than any other kind of tax — for that matter, to a far greater extent than anything else the government does — undermines both the concept and practice of self-ownership. It undermines liberty. Indeed, matters can't be otherwise, for as Walter E. Williams once



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said, the only thing that “fundamentally distinguishes” a free man from a slave is that the latter labors under coercion so that the fruits of his labor can be used to gratify someone else’s desires.

Whether the slave labors to satisfy the needs of one master or those of 300 million, and whether he lives on his master’s estate or thousands of miles away from it does nothing to change the fact that as long as portions of his property are confiscated to subsidize the desires of others, he remains a slave.

This isn’t hyperbole. When a person’s material assets are forcefully taken from him, it isn’t just his material assets that he loses. Taken from him as well are his resources in time and labor. Put another way, man does not live by bread alone. Work is as much of a psychological, and even spiritual, necessity as it is an economic and physical one. When a person is deprived of his bread, his sense of wholeness, his integrity, is assaulted as well.

Yet there is more.

To tax income, the IRS also has to know a whole lot of other information about those whom it taxes. In a nation devoted to liberty, it is unacceptable that the federal government should be privy to the hours citizens work, the names of their employers, exactly how much they make, etc.

Finally, it is a no brainer that those endowed with awesome power to confiscate possess equally awesome political power — the power to reward allies and punish enemies. That is, they have the power to erode the rule of law and the equity that it insures.

The IRS is an affront to every lover of liberty. Hopefully, the current controversy in which it is embroiled will raise the public’s awareness of the fact that it, along with the income tax, needs to be eliminated once and for all.



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