

Government Aid for Tsunami Victims Is Wrong

by John Cobin, Ph.D. for *The Times Examiner*
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Someone will say “How can you be so cold-hearted Dr. Cobin?” “Don’t you realize the gravity of the December 2004 Indian Ocean tragedy that killed over 155,000 people, left millions more homeless, and destroyed so much enterprise?” “How can we Americans, especially Christians, do anything but support a generous U.S. government aid package for Southeast Asia?”

Speaking on the floor of the United States House of Representatives in 1827, Congressman Col. Davy Crockett said: “I have as much respect for the memory of the deceased, and as much sympathy for the sufferings of the living, if suffering there be, as any man in this House, but we must not permit our respect for the dead or our sympathy for a part of the living to lead us into an act of injustice to the balance of the living. I will not go into an argument to prove that Congress has no power to appropriate this money as an act of charity... We have the right, as individuals, to give away as much of our own money as we please in charity; but as members of Congress we have no right so to appropriate a dollar of the public money.” Crockett was right, even though he might have seemed cold-hearted to his peers.



In 1887, President Grover Cleveland refused to provide aid to drought-stricken Texas farmers. “I can find no warrant for such an appropriation in the Constitution, and I do not believe that the power and duty of the General Government ought to be extended to the relief of individual suffering that is in no manner properly related to the public service or benefit. A prevalent tendency to disregard the limited mission of this power and duty should, I think, be steadfastly resisted, to the end the lesson should be constantly enforced that though the people support the Government the Government should not support the people... The friendliness and charity of our countrymen can always be relied upon to relieve their fellow-citizens in misfortune. This has been repeatedly and quite lately demonstrated. Federal aid in such cases encourages the expectation of paternal care on the part of the Government and weakens the sturdiness of our national character, while it prevents the indulgence among our people of that kindly sentiment and conduct which strengthens the bonds of a common brotherhood.” Cleveland too was right—to the chagrin of many.



Similarly, I remember professor and columnist Walter Williams teaching the same thing. If you pass by a poor, homeless man and feel charitable and compassionate towards him, how can it be right to then go hold-up another person in order to benefit the poor man? It is wrong to rob Peter to pay Paul. While you can be virtuous with your own money, it is unjust and wrong to extort money from one group of people in order to perform a charitable deed. Through its current taxation policies, the federal government coercively—and wrongly—extorts money from citizens. Williams is right, as usual. We may not rob one man in order to assist another and still be just—even if we have the best of intentions. Moreover, since government aid money received by tsunami survivors has been extorted from citizens or taxpayers, recipients become guilty of receiving stolen funds.



Theft and extortion are always wrong. There is no event or circumstance which cleanses such activities. Likewise, murder is always wrong, no matter if all the great philosophers of the world unite and declare that the unborn, the disabled, or (in Hitler’s case) the Jews have no rights to life. And democratic processes, like voting on whether theft and murder are acceptable, can not possibly purify wickedness. Who will tell an unborn child, a disabled person, or a robbery victim that his loss is in the public interest and is thus justifiable? “Suck it up Pal. Your sacrifice was needed for the well-being of the ant hill.” Will the victim be pacified by such Darwinian and socialistic claptrap? I don’t think so. Sane people do not like to be robbed, pillaged, or murdered. Make no mistake about it; taxpayers are victims of extortion—especially when they are forced to pay unavoidable direct taxes that are not apportioned according to the Constitution’s provisions. The fact that such felonies of extortion are committed by elected representatives does not excuse the evil deed.

Should hard cases like tsunami tragedies allow us to violate the rule of law? Isn't stealing justified by such cataclysmic events? No, and don't be misled by those who claim that the existence of democratic processes and our rights to representative government changes the nature of the extortion. That notion is fraudulent. The law becomes useless when it is so easily trampled. Exceptions to the law and truth set a precedent that opens the door for more extortion in the future. As the adage goes, "hard cases make bad law".

The global race is on to be the nation that provides the most government aid to victims in Southeast Asia. Yet we should not be a part of the hoopla or encourage the looting of citizens anywhere. Be sure to pray for the survivors of the tsunami and grieve for the dead and suffering. If you have opportunity, be generous in your charitable giving for them. But don't allow your good intentions and actions to be tainted by supporting extortive taxation policies that rob unwilling victims and send stolen funds across the globe.