

---

---

# The Voluntaryist

---

---

Whole Number 146

"If one takes care of the means, the end will take care of itself"

3rd Quarter 2010

## If You Have a Tool, You'll Probably Use It: On the Evolution of Tax-Supported Schools in Certain Parts of the United States

By Carl Watner

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Footnotes to this article are available at [www.voluntaryist.com](http://www.voluntaryist.com)]

In 2008, I discovered a two-volume set of books entitled UNIVERSAL EDUCATION IN THE SOUTH (1936) by Charles Dabney. The author was the son of Reverend Robert Lewis Dabney (1820- 1898), who had been a professor at the Union Theological Seminary in Richmond and was especially well-known for his attacks on government education in 1876. Volume I, which covered "From the Beginning to 1900," was so fascinating that I purchased my own used copy and began research on the rise of tax-supported schooling.

As the sub-title of this article indicates, it does not relate to the activities of such people as Horace Mann, Calvin Stowe, and others who "imported" the Prussian model of government schools into other parts of the United States. That has been dealt with elsewhere, such as in Samuel L. Blumenfeld's IS PUBLIC EDUCATION NECESSARY? (1981). Dabney points out, "the idea of free universal education was practically unknown in the countries from which the early settlers came, and it developed very slowly in America." [1] Where did this idea that schools should be funded by the government (in the Southern states) originate, and how did local Southern governments overcome their citizenry's natural reluctance to pay taxes to support them? The purpose of this article is to shed some light on the answers to these questions, and to quote some of the rhetoric used to convince Southerners that taxation was in their best interests, and that they should rely upon governments, rather than voluntaryism, to direct the education of their children.

In early American colonial history, the formal provision of education was primarily a function reserved to the wealthy and upper classes of society. Among the lower classes, it was common for parents and ministers to supply the rudiments of learning. It was not until after the Revolutionary War that a major societal concern surfaced regarding education. Among the constitutions of the original thirteen states, only North Carolina's and Pennsylvania's mentioned the subject, authorizing the establishment of at least one school in each county, "with such salaries to the masters, paid by the public." At that time, education was certainly not considered a function of the national government. There was no mention of the subject in either the Declaration of Independence or the

federal Constitution. Here was an opportunity for voluntaryism to have flourished. As Dabney wrote:

A great advance in educational enterprises of a private and ecclesiastical character followed [the Revolution]. The wealthy established private schools. Academies and colleges were started wherever a few pupils could be gathered together and teachers found. A new ideal of education was in the making, but universal education at public cost, as a practical possibility, was still undreamed of. [2]

Perhaps the first well-known personage in this country to broach the idea of "free" government-provided schooling for all students was Thomas Jefferson. In 1779, he presented his "Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge" to the Virginia Legislature. The bill provided for three years of elementary school training for all children, rich and poor (though slave children would have been excluded). Although Massachusetts claims to have enacted the first public school law in America in 1647, in New England public education was considered a function of the church, while in Virginia and the rest of the South it was considered a function of the state. [3] Jefferson's view was that "The state must provide for the education of all its citizens and this it should do through local agencies." [4]

To show the progression of this idea of "universal education at state expense for all" over the next one hundred years, we need to look no further than John B. Minor's INSTITUTES OF COMMON AND STATUTE LAW, published in 1876. According to Minor,

There are but four modes of general education possible - namely:

1. Every parent may be left to provide for his children such instruction as he can, without the government concerning itself therewith.
2. The government may undertake to assist the *indigent alone*, leaving the rest of the community to shift for themselves.
3. The government may give *partial aid to all*, leaving each some additional expense, much or little, to bear, in the shape of tuition fee, or otherwise.
4. The government may provide, at the common expense, for the complete *elementary instruction* of all classes, just as it provides for the protection of all. [5]

The two basic assumptions embraced by the idea of universal public schools were: 1) "that education is a

(continued on page 3)

---

---

---

---

# The Voluntaryist

Editor: Carl Watner

## Subscription Information

Published quarterly by The Voluntaryists, P.O. Box 275, Gramling, SC 29348. A six-issue subscription is \$25. For overseas postage, please add \$5. Single back issues are \$5. Gold and silver readily accepted. Please check the number on your mailing label to see when you should renew. THE VOLUNTARYIST is online at [www.voluntaryist.com](http://www.voluntaryist.com). Permission to reprint granted without special request.

## R. C. Hoiles Revisited

*[Editor's Note: Raymond Cyrus (R. C.) Hoiles (1878-1970) was the founder of the Freedom Chain of newspapers. For more than 35 years, in conversations, columns, and editorials, he stated his belief that human beings can enjoy happier and more prosperous lives where force and threats of force are absent from human relations. Although he started out as a supporter of limited government, he evolved into an able proponent of voluntarism. One of his pet themes was the separation of State and education. For many years, he had a standing offer of \$ 500 for any school superintendent in areas where his papers were published. He challenged public school officials to explain to him how State schools accorded with the Golden Rule. He was never seriously taken up on his offer. Hoiles also opposed the internment of Japanese-American citizens during World War II. He began as a printer's devil and operated 20 newspapers by the time he died. He presented a rare mixture of worldly practicality and principle, which marked him as a philosophical businessman. "A man should be free to make his own decisions," he used to say, "and to learn from his mistakes and to profit when his choice was wise and correct." The following was reprinted from an unsigned editorial in the Colorado Springs GAZETTE-TELEGRAPH, July 11, 1972, p. 6-A, and is offered to our readers in the spirit of recognizing one of the unsung heroes of the 20th Century libertarian movement. For further information see an article by R. C. in THE VOLUNTARYIST, Whole No. 17 ("Unlimited Voluntary Exchanges,") and "To Thine Own Self Be True: The Story of Raymond Cyrus Hoiles and his Freedom Newspapers," in Whole No. 18.]*

Since the death of R. C. Hoiles (head of the Freedom Newspapers group), we have encountered a surprising number of individuals who have volunteered such remarks as, "Well, I used to think Hoiles was all wrong with the trend of events, I've about changed my mind;" "Hoiles was much closer to reality than many folks gave him credit. Some of his positions evoked emotional antagonism but the passing of time is proving him more and more correct;" "By God, he saw it coming. With government taxes consuming close to half of everything produced, who can argue with his warning?"

It would have been out of character for R. C. (as

associates and friends called him), to have said, "I told you so," for his motive was never to be proven correct, but rather to stimulate people to see for themselves the consequences of ever-expanding government.

One can go back to the days when he authored a signed column, from about 1935 until the 1950's, and find repeated warnings about the approaching leviathan state. Even prior to World War II, he continually explained the dangers of government deficits, pointing out that the inevitable result would be expanding credit to finance the deficits with resulting inflation. As more and more the federal government incurred deficits and financed itself by, in effect, repudiating its debt with inflation, R. C. warned that this "painless" sleight-of-hand, continued indefinitely, would give birth to a monster that could collapse the nation.

R. C.'s most controversial position related to what he thought would be the inevitable (he always thought of consequences in the long run) effect of government schooling the young. This was wildly distorted as being "against teachers" and against "people of little means" and an endless list of other emotional reactions that begged his points, which were:

1. The control of the schools would inexorably drift away from the "local control" concept to more centralized government control as the local units obtained funds from the larger government units. (As the state government offers more subsidy to the local school district, it demands more control. Then come federal funds and also the control attending such grants.) It would be illogical to conclude that once gaining this power, it would not teach that big government is the primary source of virtue and truth in order to perpetuate itself.

2. The foundation of a sound social order is rooted firmly in moral and ethical education, rather than training, and the government must by nature follow one of two courses: (a) neutrality because of differing views on what is sound moral and ethical reality; or (b) the advocating of views which are offensive to some individuals who are forced to submit their children and/or pay to support such views. This dilemma was answered largely by assuming a stance of neutrality which tends to produce children who have little or no basic philosophy of life unless obtained elsewhere. The result has been a reversal of some 2,000 years of educational philosophy which held that education was primarily for the purpose of inculcating a rational morality. Whether or not our present era is reaping the result of this could be disputed, but there are more and more people who sense something is seriously wrong with the grounding of the young.

Again, this was not meant to imply that the people - who manned the government school system -

---

---

were “failing” in their job, but rather that their job just did not include and could not by its nature include this preeminent phase of a child’s rearing. The ancients well understood that the founding of a child in a sound morality is an almost full-time endeavor, with the most important place the educational process.

Further, he held it was just elementary justice that no one should be forced to support an educational system in which he did not believe, making no distinction between this and forcing people to support a religion they did not advocate.

Another position which R. C. clung to tenaciously was that it was immoral (in the sense of being out of harmony with natural order) for the government to tax some people for the benefit of other people. Call it welfare, subsidies, government sanctioned or encouraged monopolies, all these efforts were for the purpose of “robbing Peter to pay Paul.” These are distributions of wealth on an involuntary basis and create consequences that in the long run are inimical to everyone, particularly the beneficiaries of the “booty.”

R. C. ran it by thusly: if it is immoral for A and B, as individuals, to gang up on C and take his wealth by force, it is wrong for A and B to delegate to the government as their agent the right to rob C and split the loot with them. This was another way of saying what Mr. Jefferson meant when he contended “the same justice is owed from a million to one that is owed from one to a million.”

More and more we witness the government becoming, as has been said, “an illusion by which everyone endeavors to live at the expense of everybody else,” one out of six civilian employees is on the government payroll and by 1980 this ratio is supposed to drop to one in four.

Where will all this end?

One answer, possibly not far from the truth, is: “And the fall of Rome was mighty!”

But then, R. C. always held that the powers of regeneration are unbelievably great and that eventually men will understand the folly of forcing their fellow-man to labor to their advantage just because they have the political power to enforce such an action.

As R. C. would say, “It took men thousands and thousands of years to understand the folly of chattel slavery and it is going to take quite a spell to get people to understand that it is just as disastrous, in the long run, to be the slave of an all-powerful government.” ▽

“The worst lesson compulsory government schools teach [its students] at an early age is that it's okay to rob at gun point from others to solve your problems.”  
- Stormy Mon, IMAGINE FREEDOM (1999), p. 47.

## If You Have a Tool, You'll Probably Use It

*continued from page 1*

function of the State rather than a family or parental obligation;” and 2) “that the State has the right and power to raise by taxation” the funds required to adequately support the schools. [6] Some of the principal impediments to the implementation of these ideas were 1) the general public's dislike of taxation; 2) parental rejection of the idea that the State should be responsible for their offspring; and 3) the humiliation attached to the idea that their children would be attending “free” public schools. (Hitherto, only the poorest of the poor would accept government handouts.) [7]

Minor's analysis reveals that the opening wedge of government involvement in education was legislation regarding orphans and indigent children. Although in both England and its colonies it was common for wealthy benefactors to endow charity schools for the poor, government legislation required that the overseers of the poor obtain an order from their county court to place those children likely to become a burden to the parish (such as beggars, orphans, paupers, and illegitimate children) into apprenticeships. [8] Masters were not only responsible for teaching their charges a trade, but were obligated to instruct their apprentices in reading, writing, and common arithmetic. [9] The humanitarian movement, which advocated giving poor children an opportunity for education, supported the idea that the State was responsible for the education of those children whose parents were not likely to attend to the matter themselves. [10] As Edgar Knight, another historian of public schools in the South, observed: By the time of the American Revolution, “the theory was gaining that caring for and educating and training poor children were functions of the State.” [11]

Thomas Jefferson, however, approached universal education from another point of view. His belief was that it was the business of the State to educate because a free country required an intelligent citizenry. [12] “Enlighten the people generally and tyranny and oppressions ... will vanish ....” “If a nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be.” [13] According to Jefferson, “schools ... must be provided by the state” because to give “information to the people ... is the most certain, and the most legitimate engine of government.” [14]

After Jefferson was elected governor of Virginia in 1776, he became personally involved in the revision of the state's laws. In June 1779, the committee of revision presented the legislature with one hundred and twenty-six bills, among which were some Jefferson himself had principally written. The two most germane to our discussion here are his “Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge” and “A Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom.” In the former, he proposed three years of government-paid elementary schooling for all

---

children, rich and poor alike; college (high schools) for those requiring a middle level of instruction; and finally a state-sponsored university and library to complete the educational edifice. Each county was to be divided into wards or districts, and the voters of each ward were to tax themselves in order to support their own local schools. This thoroughly socialist plan is what Dabney described as "the first proposal ever made for local taxation for public schools" in America. [15] Another interesting aspect of Jefferson's advocacy was his belief that those who could neither read nor write should be denied state citizenship and the right to vote. [16] Although Jefferson supported compulsory taxation to provide public schools, "he took a moderate position on compulsory education." [17] Jefferson did not believe it was proper to force a parent to educate his child. As Jefferson wrote:

It is better to tolerate the rare instance of a parent refusing to let his child be educated, than to shock the common feelings and ideas by the [felonious removal of the child from the parent's custody] and [by the] education of the infant against the will of the father. [18]

In contrast, in his bill for establishing religious freedom Jefferson took a very libertarian position against all the elements of a state religion. He rejected state-licensed clergy, he refused to endorse state-approved prayer, curriculum, textbooks, compulsory attendance laws, and state-compelled financing. One wonders why Jefferson did not realize that the same principles that apply to state religious establishments apply to state educational establishments. [19] For example, Jefferson held that religion was a natural right of mankind, just as he supported the "unalienable rights of parents to direct the education of their children." [20] However, on the issue of public taxation to support the church and the school, Jefferson took contradictory positions. "He declared that 'to compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves is sinful and tyrannical' and 'that even forcing him to support this or that teacher of his own religious persuasion, is depriving him of the comfortable liberty of giving his contributions to the particular pastor whose morals he would make his pattern,' ..." [21] Despite his realization that coercion was wrong in the case of religion, Jefferson did not recognize that it was "unjust to take the property of one man to educate the children of another. ... In essence Jefferson didn't apply his own professed principles against coercive financing" of religion when it came "to education like he [sh]ould have." [22] This error, from its small beginnings in Jefferson's legislative bill, has led to massive state-run educational establishments all across the United States.

Government legislation on the subject of the poor and of apprentices was based on several questionable assumptions. The first assumption was that such children were entitled to the basics of an education. If they were,

then such a service must be provided by their parents, the government, or some charitable institution. [23] Most proponents of an educational entitlement thought that it should be the responsibility of the State to provide children with schooling. Secondly, it was assumed that no other means of accomplishing this goal existed, even though there was plenty of evidence that various types of education were being provided under voluntarism.

Jefferson and others after him extended the first assumption by claiming that *all* children had a right to an education. The only question to be answered was: At whose expense? Jefferson's answer was that the citizens of the county or ward should be taxed to provide all the children in their local jurisdiction with schools. Why didn't the church reformers, Jefferson, and others of the time eschew the State and depend upon voluntary efforts? The only answer I have is this: the State was there. The human tendency is to take the easy way out. If the State had not been there, those advocating schooling for the uneducated poor would have had to 1) either organize the State from scratch; 2) dig into their own pockets and help fund that which they were advocating; or 3) organize (themselves and in concert with others who shared their idea) the necessary number of charity schools to provide education for the poor. Given the existence of the State, and its prior concern with the indigent and their education, they took the easy way out: they advocated taxation. Why Jefferson couldn't see the parallels between state provision of religion and state provision of education is an unexplainable anomaly. It is comparable to his being an owner of slaves when writing that "all men are created equal" in the Declaration of Independence.

Despite Jefferson's advocacy of public schools, the idea of universal, state-paid education did not come about quickly. Educational historians of the South, time and time again, repeat that many Southerners had a "natural reluctance to being taxed." Furthermore, the historians note that many Southerners held to the idea that it was not the function of the State to educate; that education was not conducive to good citizenship; that State instruction was a usurpation of parental rights; and that Negroes should never be educated. [24]. Here are some additional commentaries:

Local taxation of property for the support of community schools, entirely free and open to rich and poor alike, was not a popular measure. Two centuries of apprenticeship and poor laws had not developed a strong enough demand for the new type of education to overcome the dread of cost in taxes or to enforce the acceptance of the principle that the [S]tate should compel a man to tax himself for the education of his neighbor's children. [25]

The traditional hatred of taxes was universal in the South. The planters looked upon internal improvements [roads] as they did upon

---

education, as mere excuses for taxation, and all taxation to them was evil. [26]

All taxes were an abomination to early Americans and taxation for schools was unthinkable for the old Virginians. If there were to be schools and institutions for learning, the funds for them must be provided in some other way than through taxes on property. [27]

The provision of education by the state to paupers expressed the prevailing idea of the people that a man's children should be educated by himself in his own social status, if possible, and that only the poor should be provided with the elements of an education at the expense of the [S]tate. The ruling class believed that any extended education of the masses would lead to unrest, to disappointment and to what the aristocrats called "leveling." Their view was that the [S]tate should not interfere in the education of the children except when charity absolutely demanded it. [28]

In 1872, James Killebrew was appointed assistant superintendent of schools in Tennessee. His salary was paid by the Peabody Education Fund. The greatest obstacle to the establishment of a real system of schools, declared Killebrew, was the old idea that education should be left to private enterprise; that it was wrong to tax the rich for the education of the poor; that the [S]tate had no right to compel a father to educate his children, much less those of his neighbor; that such procedure would tend to destroy the sense of obligation of the citizens to the discharge of their duty to their children and those of their fellow citizens. [29]

Aversion to taxation has been the great obstacle to the schools in the Southern States. Taxes are simply money paid for civilized government. The savage alone is exempt from taxation. We were formerly taught that the best government was that which levied the smallest taxes. The future will teach that liberal taxation, fairly levied and properly applied, is the chief mark of a civilized people. In the old days we heard that it was robbery to tax Brown's property to educate Jones' children. In the new day no one will question the right of the [S]tate to tax both Brown and Jones to develop the [S]tate through its children. [30]

It has often been said that one government intervention leads to another. In the historical case being examined here, we find this happening. When supporters of State education of the indigent discovered that "the poor would rather keep their children at home [rather] than to send them to free [State] schools where they were branded [as] paupers," they argued that ALL children,

not just poor children should be educated at the expense of the State. "The true policy of the State is to recognize no distinction betwixt the rich and the poor; to put them all upon the same footing; ... ." [31] In other words, if children of poor parents will not attend State schools, force everyone to attend State schools in order to avoid the stigma of 'pauper' schools.

The supporters of State-provided education had another way of defusing the objection to 'pauper' schools. As John Minor observed: "the government may give partial aid to all" via general taxation but still make every able-bodied father pay some of the additional cost of educating his children. This mixed method of local taxation and family contributions was known as the rate-bill system. Here is how it worked. Local school trustees contracted with a teacher for a term of teaching. At the end of the term, "they g[a]ve him an order upon the town superintendent for such portion of money as may have been voted by the district. ... If the public money [wa]s not sufficient to pay the teacher's wages, the trustees proceeded to make out a rate-bill for the residue, charging each parent or guardian, according to the number of days' attendance of his children." [32] Indigent families were exempt from such additional taxation. In New York State, during the late 1840s, "something like 40 per cent of the resources of the schools came from rates charged parents." [33]

<p>"Public school is the enemy of the family..." - Carolyn Chute in Bill Kauffman, LOOK HOMEWARD, AMERICA (2006), p. 122.</p>
---

The struggle for and against the rate-bill system ran in two directions. Parents who were assessed the extra charges wanted to foist those expenses upon the State in the form of general taxation upon everyone. On the other hand, the general taxpayers, especially those without children, wanted the families of students to pay as much as they could. Furthermore, since the rate-bill system required every family to pay in proportion to the attendance of their children, there was a great inducement for many parents to wink at the absence and truancy of their children from school. [34] The final outcome of the struggle against the rate-bill system was decided by the immigrants who crowded into the large cities, such as New York. "They were without property to be taxed, but many of them had a vote, and they demanded education." [35] The preponderance of the citizenry was in favor of "free elementary schools for all" and the last state to use the rate-bill system abandoned this method in 1871. [36]

Those who agitated to eliminate the rate-bill system advocated what they called "the free school" idea. This was the principle "that the schools should be absolutely free to all and supported at public and general expense." [37] No longer would individual parents be assessed for

---

sending their children to a local government school. Taxpayers who had no children would be forced to bear part of the expense of paying for the education of children via general taxation.

Some of the rhetoric to bring about this change is very interesting. In North Carolina, Calvin Henderson Wiley was "one of the most devoted champions of universal education our country has ever produced." [38] He promoted state legislation which authorized the formation of districts permitting the people to tax themselves for their local schools if they desired to have them. He also assisted in founding "Library Associations" to help teachers collect books and establish circulating libraries. "Out of them grew county associations to improve the teachers, to diffuse knowledge on educational subjects, to overcome the prejudices against public schools, and to educate the public to tax themselves." [39] State officials and school superintendents were also notorious for wanting to expand the role of their states in educational endeavors. As one commentator noted: "One of the duties of ... school officials was to create a public sentiment in favor of public schools." [40] For example, we find in Gov. Reuben Chapman's message to the Alabama legislature of November 18, 1849, the following:

The subject of the common schools deserves all the consideration and encouragement it is in the power of the assembly to bestow. The whole theory of our form of Government is based upon the capacity of the people. Without a general diffusion of intelligence among them, the machinery of a Government thus constituted can not be expected to move on successfully. The highest and most important of all the duties of a free Government is to advance the cause of education, and guard against that decline of liberty which results from neglecting the minds of the people. [41]

Fifty years later, State School Superintendent John W. Abercromie of Alabama speaking in 1900, said

[I]f we would properly qualify our people for citizenship [we must] give to counties, townships, districts, and municipalities the power of taxation for educational purposes. If the people of any county, township, district, city or town desire to levy a tax upon their property to build a school-house, or to supplement the State fund, for the purposes of educating their children, they should have the ... power to do it. ... There should be no limit ... to the power of the people who own property to tax themselves for the purpose of fitting the children of the State for intelligent and patriotic citizenship. [42]

Another organization that played a significant part in the expansion of government schools in the South was a charitable trust founded in 1867, by George Peabody

(1795-1869), a wealthy Baltimore businessman. [43] The purpose of the Peabody trust was to encourage and promote schools in "those portions of our beloved and common country which ... suffered ... the destructive ravages ... of civil war." [44] Although there was no stipulation in the original bequest of one million dollars, the trustees of the George Peabody Educational Fund made the decision that they would disburse funds only to those communities which would help themselves by raising matching funds through taxation. The Peabody Fund did not give aid to private or religious schools, or to any schools not affiliated with their State's system. [45] The Reverend Barnas Sears was named general agent of the fund and he became one of the leading agitators for free public elementary schools in the South after the Civil War. "Free schools for the whole people" became his motto. [46] According to Dabney. Dr. Sears "preached free public schools as a necessity in a democratic government." [47] His stated goal was to teach the taxpayers of the South "that there is no more legitimate tax that can be levied on property than that for the education of the masses." [48] Jabez Lamar Monroe Curry succeeded Sears in 1881. "When told that 'the state had no right to tax one man to educate another man's children, that it was dangerous to educate the masses, or that to educate a poor white or a Negro meant to make a criminal or to spoil a laborer'," Curry's reply was that "Ignorance is no remedy for anything. If the State has a right to live at all, it has a right to educate." [49]

### Conclusion

The State's right to exist was certainly never called into question by any Southerners, even those who supported secession from the North. The idea of "educating men for the service of the [S]tate traces back to Plato." [50] Karl Marx embraced the idea in the tenth plank of The Communist Manifesto, which he and Engels published 1848: "Free education for all children in public schools." In 1855, William Henry Ruffner, a Virginian, pointed out that "state education is but educational communism," but even he and other opponents of government-run education never objected on general principles to the concept of taxation. [51] For example, Herbert Spencer in his 1842 series of articles "On the Proper Sphere of Government" never once questioned the propriety or morality of forcing people to contribute funds to a government which would then "administer justice." Coming from a dissenting family, Spencer did recognize "the injustice of expecting men to assist in the maintenance of a plan of instruction which they do not approve; and forcing them to pay towards the expences [sic] of teaching, from which neither they nor their children derive any benefit." [52] But apparently Spencer had no problem with forcing men to pay for police protection, defense from foreign enemies, and the settlement of legal disputes. In short, he did not object to taxation when it was used to support some

---

---

function of government which he thought necessary or of which he approved.

To the voluntaryist, on the other hand, the very concept of taxation is morally wrong. Taxation is theft. Government agents must initiate force, or the threat of force, upon those who refuse to pay. R. C. Hoiles, founder of the Freedom Newspapers, was probably the first libertarian in the 20th Century to oppose government schools on the basis that they were tax-supported. He used to argue: if it is morally wrong for A to take money from B against B's will, then it is wrong for A and C to take money from B. It is still wrong if A and C associate with hundreds of thousands of others to rob B. As he used to ask, at what point does the number of people involved in an act of thievery turn it into a morally proper activity? The answer should be obvious: a wrong is a wrong even if everyone supports it. [53]

In an exchange of letters on "Why Homeschool" in 1993, I wrote that the only consistent way to oppose government schools is to oppose them because they are tax-supported. [54] That means opposing every service government provides because everything the government does - from police protection, roads, courts, defense against foreign enemies to schools - is paid for via taxation. In short, that means opposing the very concept of government itself because government could not exist without taxation. Government violates the property rights of all those from whom it collects taxes. If it gave people the choice to pay for a service, or order less of it, or decline its services altogether, without suffering any punishment, then there would be no difference in principle between such a government and a voluntary organization. People could shop for educational services wherever and however they chose. Yes, some people would remain unable to read or write, if they were not forced to attend schools, and if their parents were not forced to pay for their schooling. However, it is interesting to note that we have not overcome the problem of illiteracy even after a century and a half of educational coercion and government schools. On the other hand, we would have avoided all the ill-fated consequences of government in our lives and schooling.

Since voluntaryists are opposed to the use of coercion to support governments, the question of how government should spend its tax revenues disappears. Most voluntaryists support education, roads, and protection services. It is not these ends which they call into question, but rather the coercive means used by the State to provide them. Since taxation is theft, taxation cannot legitimately be used to attain any ends. And of one thing we can be certain: If you take care of the means, the end will take care of itself. If you try to force the end, the means will destroy and vitiate the good intentions with which you start.

There is only one way to freedom and that is by voluntary means. All else will fail. But neither is there any

guarantee that voluntaryism will succeed. If it does, or at least to the extent that it does, we can be assured that it will depend on obtaining people's willing cooperation. Compelling them to "cooperate" is not only contradictory, but it will never work. [V]

### **State Education Radically Wrong**

*continued from page 8*

State provision for religion has proved an injury to the cause, and a curse to the people - so a State provision for education will prove an injury to the cause and a curse to the people.

The life of the State is in the life of its individual members. Take away from the head of a family all direct concern in the education of his children; let the school house be built for him, the teacher furnished, the whole routine of studies prescribed, length of session and hours of study all mapped out by commissioners, it being left to him only to take what is offered, to drive his children away from home early each morning, and to pay the tax-gatherer when he come round, and as certain as is the connection between cause and effect, his soul will be congealed, his interest in his family diminished, those ennobling affections which spring up spontaneously along the pathway of parental toil, will in a measure wither and die, and those tender solitudes which were meant to divert his mind from sordid pursuits, will be turned in to deepen that love of money for its own sake, which they were designed to check. He toils not now to educate his children, but to pay his taxes and accumulate a fortune. Were the money he pays a spontaneous offering for the good of his family, he would experience pleasure and enlargement of heart; but he instinctively hates a tax laid by government, even when he can but approve the object, and he is made a worse man by the visit of the sheriff. Of all taxes, that laid for an eleemosynary object is the most revolting because there is an instinctive feeling in the human breast that charity in every form ought to be free and not coerced; that it ought to be individual and not government.

The work of educating the entire population of our land is certainly a vast undertaking; but not as vast as the work of christianizing the same population. And the latter is, in every view, the more important work. Does that prove it to be the business of the State? ... [V]

"A state school cannot escape being, in some manner at least, a state church."

- George Gardner, "Liberty, The State, and The School," 20 LAW AND CONTEMPORARY PROBLEMS (1955), p. 194.

---

---

## State Education Radically Wrong

By William Henry Ruffner

*[Editor's Note: The excerpts below were written anonymously, and published in the PRESBYTERIAN CRITIC in 1855, and were reprinted in Volume 40 of the SOUTHERN PLANTER AND FARMER in April 1879. The author was born in 1824, and became an advocate of government schools in his home state of Virginia in the late 1860s. Despite his change of opinion, his argument that "education by the state 'steps in between the parent and child' severing these tender ties" and that "public school officials disrupt family relationships and harm 'family' government" are as true today as when he wrote them. For additional information see Walter Javan Fraser, Jr., WILLIAM HENRY RUFFNER: A LIBERAL (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Tennessee, March 1970, pp. 466-472.)*

Again, state education is but *educational communism*. They are based both upon the same philosophic fallacy, and are equally opposed to the nature of man. When the direct results of a man's labor are placed beyond his personal control, his great motive to exertion is taken away, and he feels but little inclination to labor at all. All can see how this is in the matter of property; why can they not see it in the matter of education? Let a man's children be fed and clothed by a public provision, and the proceeds of his labor be taken from him and thrown into a common stock; and it is easy to imagine that he will

depreciate as a man, as a member of society. The same error is seen in the English Poor-Law system; and in all general State provision for the ordinances of religion. Pauperism in England grows by what it is fed upon. And when the State provides liberally for the religious wants of the people, the effect is corrupting upon the Church, collectively and individually; and that just in proportion as the provision is liberal. The whole system is calculated to withdraw the incentives to individual effort, and thus to weaken and emaciate the religious nature of the people. These have become familiar truths to us in America, and we are prone to wonder at the obtuseness of other nations on this subject. Why then will we shut our eyes to the fact that the whole fabric of State education rests upon the same sort of plausible argumentation that sustains the Church and State system of the Old World? They there say that religion is indispensable to the well-being of the State - and that the work of enlightening the masses is too great to be left to private means; ergo, the State must undertake it. The advocates of State education reason exactly so; education is indispensable to the well-being of the State: the work of enlightening the masses is too great to be left to private means; ergo, the State must undertake it! If the latter argument is sound, the former is sound: but if the former is fallacious, the latter is fallacious! If a

*(continued on page 7)*

---

---

---

---

## The Voluntaryist

---

---

P.O. Box 275 • Gramling, South Carolina 29348



### FIRST CLASS

Please renew your subscription if the number on your address label is within one digit of this issue's number.