



## Folk heroes teach work and redistribution

Pamela Romney Openshaw

September 23, 2014

The Little Red Hen of folk tale fame said, “He who does not work does not eat.” Robin Hood left England’s Sherwood Forest to steal from the king and the wealthy to give to the poor. These two childhood fables clash head-on.

The first folk tale praises industry and a strong work ethic, the second acclaims redistribution of wealth. Which fable works? We’ve done both in America. During our first century, we went with the Little Red Hen and had prosperity and abundance. Then we switched to Robin Hood’s strategy of redistributing wealth, done through taxation and regulation. (In a sly plot twist, our modern version of Robin Hood has government stealing from the people as well as people stealing from the government — sort of a two way “gotcha!”)

Today, government takes from those who have to give to those who have not. How has this redistribution worked out? Are there fewer poor? Is our economy more vibrant, our work force more dedicated and ethical, our family life stronger? Many don’t think so. Evidence points to failure of the Robin Hood principles.

Redistribution of wealth has been a dud for several reasons. First, it is compulsory. We are forced; no “opt-out” exists and we participate without a choice. Government has the power to force us, as George Washington explained: “Government is not reason, it is not eloquence, it is force...” Government’s ability to force was provided to guarantee our rights, however, not violate them.

Some think it is OK for government to take money from us to do good things, that this is compassionate. One woman commented, “We have to force people to help the needy. No one helps others unless he is forced to do so.” Really? The National Philanthropic Trust says 95.4% of U.S. households voluntarily give an average of \$2,974 each every year to some form of charity—a total of \$335.17 billion in 2013. That’s a lot of unforced compassion.

Government invented its welfare responsibilities. Previously, private charities run mostly by churches reached the poor in every city. Marvin Olasky’s *The Tragedy of American Compassion*, gives examples. In 1891 in Baltimore, for instance, The Association for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor, only one of many charities in the city, had 2000 volunteers that made 8227 assistance visits to 1025 families. New York City missionary Charles

Brace, of The Children's Aid Society, placed 91,536 orphaned or abandoned children permanently in rural homes from 1853-1893, with astounding success. These are not isolated incidents. They show that we don't require compulsion to help others. Olasky says charitable giving dropped substantially when federal programs took over. Churches and individuals let the government do their work.

Second, redistribution of wealth is illegal. The property government redistributes is yours, taken from you by what Frederic Bastiat, in *The Law*, calls legal plunder. Individuals can't take others' property and neither can government; it has the same rules we have. We created government to protect property, not take it. Only two rationales for redistribution exist. If government, rather than citizens, owns all property, it can take from us. That is communism. If government is above the law and need not abide by it, it can take property. That is tyranny. America was not founded on tyranny or communism, it was founded as a constitutional republic — a free nation where people own property and government leaves it alone.

Third, redistribution of wealth invites misuse. It's the nature of redistribution to exploit power. Good is intended, but redistributed goods often go to the undeserving, who learn idleness. Those who don't work are rewarded with goods and those who do are punished by having them taken away—the polar opposite of productivity. The volume of plundered money attracts unethical people and waste, fraud and cronyism follow. Working people hide their profits, those misusing funds must hide the evidence, and dishonesty becomes the norm.

Redistribution doesn't work and the proof is in the numbers. According to the Cato Institute, we spend \$14,848 of tax money per year on every poor man, woman and child in America — \$193 billion annually. Yet welfare rolls grow yearly and 10.5 percent of us are still poor. In the aftermath, we've created a new occupation: state-subsidized idleness.

If we want prosperity, we have a guide to provide it — the original Constitution. It worked before, it will work again. Ezra Taft Benson, former Secretary of Agriculture, church leader, and patriot said, "We must restore our Constitution to save our nation." Nowhere is this more obvious than in the practice of redistribution; nowhere does our founding document authorize this larceny. We began this dysfunction with Teddy Roosevelt's "real democracy" in 1910. It's out of control and the downside is glaring.

There are times when people sincerely need help from others. We want to be a compassionate society that helps when needed. We can render assistance that offers kindness, preserves dignity and encourages future independence. The churches did that very well in past and could do so again. The best help we can offer is honest government and a sound economy, sheltered under the Little Red Hen's philosophy of providing for ourselves. A vibrant economy, presided over by a society that works for its rewards, would create the prosperity that redistribution never has provided. The utopian plenty-for-all-through-redistribution is a myth. We have to earn our own way. The Little Red Hen had it right — we can all eat well when we all work.