



Should Troublemakers Be Segregated from the General Population?

By: Daniel J. Mitchell – December 5th, 2012

Let's take a break from depressing posts about Obama's fixation on class-warfare tax policy and the failure of Washington to enact genuine entitlement reform.

It's time for another edition of "You Be the Judge." I periodically come across stories that cause me internal conflict. Often my heart gives one answer and my head disagrees. Or I'm genuinely unsure of the right approach.

Previous editions of the game include:

- Is it appropriate to put politicians on trial for economic malfeasance?
- Is it excessive vigilante justice to set your daughter's rapist on fire?
- Should prisoners with AIDS be segregated from other convicts?
- Which tax collection tactic is more brutal and unjust?
- When a wheelchair-bound guy uses a baseball bat to punish his granddaughter's molester, what's the right response?
- Should politicians set pay levels at government-owned firms?
- Is sharia law sometimes appropriate?
- What do you do about self-destructive behavior in a government-run healthcare system?
- Should there be laws against incest among consenting adults?
- Should motorists be allowed to warn other drivers about speed traps?
- Is jury nullification the right approach for victimless crimes?
- Was this angry father wrong to take matters into his own hands?
- Should drunk-rafting be a crime?

Lots of fun stories, as you can see.

Our latest example is about the Dutch are dealing with the "scum" of society. Here's some of the story from the UK-based Telegraph.

A potential name for the new Dutch community?

Hollands's capital already has a special hit squad of municipal officials to identify the worst offenders for a compulsory six month course in how to behave. Social housing problem families or tenants who do not show an improvement or refuse to go to the special units face eviction and homelessness. Eberhard van der Laan, Amsterdam's Labour mayor, has tabled the £810,000 plan to tackle 13,000 complaints of anti-social behaviour every year. He complained that long-term harassment often leads to law abiding tenants, rather than their nuisance neighbours, being driven out. "This is the world turned upside down," the mayor said at the weekend. ...The new punishment housing camps have been dubbed "scum villages" because the plan echoes a proposal from Geert Wilders, the leader of a populist Dutch Right-wing party, for special units to deal with persistent troublemakers. "Repeat offenders should be forcibly removed from their neighbourhood and sent to a village for scum," he suggested last year. "Put all the trash together." ...The tough approach taken by Mr van der Laan appears to jar with Amsterdam's famous tolerance for prostitution and soft drugs but reflects hardening attitudes to routine anti-social behaviour that falls short of criminality. There are already several small-scale trial projects in the Netherlands, including in Amsterdam, where 10 shipping container homes have been set aside for persistent offenders, living under 24-hour supervision from social workers and police.

Part of me thinks this is a good approach. Not the part about expensive social workers, to be sure, but I'm sympathetic to the notion that there are "bad apples" that cause trouble and can ruin neighborhoods.

Why not put them all together and let them stew in their own juices?

On the other hand, this soft version of prison seems inappropriate if people haven't been convicted of a crime. Surely the government could trump up some sort of charge, and even do it in a semi-legitimate fashion. These sound like the sort of people who could be nailed for all sorts of things, such as disorderly conduct, assault and battery, urinating in public, and so on.

But swinging back in the other direction, it sounds as if the "scum" are inhabitants of public housing. And while I think public housing shouldn't exist, I have no problem with the government enforcing standards of behavior as a condition of living in one of these Moochervilles. So all that's really happening is that the riff-raff of society is being shifted from one form of government-provided housing to another.

What do you think?

P.S. The Netherlands is a typical European welfare state in many ways, but it has a good school choice system and a very competitive corporate tax system (as shown in the second video in this post). But those few good policies won't be enough since the

nation's long-run fiscal outlook is as bad as Greece and worse than Spain and Italy. And if the burden of government spending gets too high, it swamps any good policies in other areas.