

AUTHOR'S NOTE

In the second quarter 1991 issue of *Choices*, the magazine of food, farm and resource issues published by the American Agricultural Economics Association, a commentary by Harold Breimyer related to, and deplored, one word in discussions of economic policy, including that for agriculture: intervention. He called it a "snarl word" intended to turn people sour as it seems to call for just pulling out rather than facing up to problems and trying to solve them. It struck me as a call for politically correct terminology in advancing governmental actions in addressing social problems. Word games are fun. So I wrote a letter to the editor. The pot *can* call the kettle black.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR OF *CHOICES*

June 17, 1991

Mr. Lyle Schertz, Editor
Choices
12708 Oak Farms Road
Herndon, Virginia 22071

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Dear Mr. Schertz:

Breimyer's commentary in the second quarter issue of *Choices* is provocative and cries out for response. Insofar as intervention is a "snarl word" that carries negative connotations toward governmental activities in the economic sphere, it is a very good word that should be drilled into the regular usage of every student of Economics 101 and Political Science 101.

Intervention is a word to be avoided by self-perpetuating politicians. They much prefer "facing up to problems and trying to solve them." By delicate selection of words, they can circumvent the need to confront the most basic tenet of American society: property rights. The omission of accurately descriptive words and the substitution of delicate nonsense words is of great and severe consequence. Among our most sacred documents is the *Declaration of Independence* stating that all men are created equal with certain inalienable rights life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. An earlier version by the followers of John Locke was life, liberty, and property. Happiness was substituted for property (probably by Thomas Jefferson) for reasons of political delicacy. Property rights were the central thrust of the American Revolution and have been the driving force of western economic development and growth.

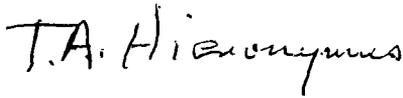
Governments have essential functions. "In the economic sphere, its most essential and pervasive role is to enforce contracts." The enforcement of contracts is the protection of property rights. So is the defense of the nation from foreign intrusion. And so is the enforcement of criminal laws, traffic regulation, etc.

But government goes past the protection of life, liberty, and property and intervenes in economic activity. "Government provides schools, a postal service, roads." The current status of our schools, the price of stamps, and the condition of roads raise doubts about the efficiency of governmental intervention. As one looks further, say into agricultural commodity price and income programs, the record of negative impacts on economic productivity becomes increasingly pronounced.

Governmental intervention into economic affairs involves property rights. Governments confiscate property through systems of taxation. What is at issue in the current social order is the effects of governmental confiscation of property and intervention in economic activity on productivity and equity of product distribution. The issue is glaringly apparent in Eastern Europe and the USSR. It will become increasingly apparent in the United States as taxes confiscate ever-increasing shares of production and pervert them to "facing up to problems and trying to solve them."

Intervention is a good word. It is gratingly descriptive. Confiscation is another good word. It is gratingly descriptive of taxation. It should find its way into our literature.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "T. A. Hieronymus". The letters are fluid and connected, with a prominent initial 'T' and 'H'.

T. A. Hieronymus
Professor Emeritus

