

# Ernstraud Magazine

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happiness sharing as a way to peace

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## §1 I Should Compromise?

Have you told your elected representative not to compromise? Shame on you! -- Of course, that depends on what you mean by compromise. We praise "I will not compromise myself" when that means shunning graft. We disrespect "I will not compromise the exact details of the plan that I am proposing." That proposal divides; it does not govern.

The purpose of government is to meet human needs. If we have no needs in common, we lose our purpose to have a government. The reason to elect legislators is to address our shared needs.

Once we identify a shared need, we can fairly have a diversity of plans aimed at meeting the need. When those plans become personal hobby horses aimed at popularity and influence, they are no longer properly aimed at our needs. They obstruct constructive collaboration.

We assemble "the assembly" in order to work out the details of our common enterprises. If you and I propose completely divergent details, our task is to discover or create new details acceptable to both of us. Failing that, we cannot be governed; the law remains silent.

Let us say to our elected representatives: "We have hired you not for your sugar-coated campaigning, but for your ability to cooperate and create something that does not yet exist." Those who understand will liberally share the credit when the task is accomplished.

## § 2 Non-Governmental Organization

In international relations, a non-governmental organization (NGO) is well recognized and accepted as an agency for providing social services without having law-making authority. It is time to extend the same principle to the neighborhood level.

Cultural diversity in the United States has reached the point where unanimity is hard to achieve. We have probably always been unanimous in condemning murder and stealing, but never in embracing a particular religion. Where we agree, it has been relatively easy to codify behaviors through public laws. Where we disagree, public laws have been slow to emerge or to endure the test of time.

The absence of agreement leaves a social void; we might even disagree about whether there is a void that needs to be filled. Some of us feel freed from unwanted control, while others feel a need to be grounded in something identifiable. This is hardly an area where a single government prescription will fit all of the people.

So how do we address the areas where we differ so fundamentally? The individual does not benefit by being cut loose and set adrift. There remains a need to be social; it is fundamental within us to do things together. We have reservations about surrendering to social control while we value the positive reinforcement of social support. Herein lies the nub of nongovernmental organization: we seek institutions which combine our efforts, that is, organize us, while they do not impose controls over us. We band together in voluntary associations according to our own preferences.

The key to utilizing NGOs is to identify which social functions need to be governed by public laws and which prosper under voluntary associations. In some places, the employer provides the social glue that encompasses needs outside the workplace. Elsewhere, patronage and party loyalty provide a social framework. Religious practice routinely involves comprehensive social participation. Secular community organizations engage the public for shared activities that address shared needs.

We need NGOs in areas where we are not unanimous. We need the flexibility to socialize without surrender to uniform control, and seek to perfect the associations that help us to do so.

### § 3 Why do Americans Hate Each Other?

How do I know Americans hate each other? I watch their behavior: they compete against each other. By perpetuating a system that bestows its wealth on the most aggressive and most greedy, many people around me demonstrate a poverty of empathy and understanding. They have surrendered happiness.

Having no enemies to hate, I must propose a conjecture: I would have to hate a person terribly to want to force him to live on less than I have. Lacking that hate, I cannot take more than my fair share out of the common pot. Indeed, I cannot abide that some individuals take less than my share out of that same pot.

There is a demeaning myth that excellent human performance is motivated only by fear or greed. This myth denies the personal satisfaction that comes from good performance. Dignity is doing my best in return for my fair share of resources. A company robs me of that dignity when it offers unequal wealth in order to bribe me to amass an unfair share for myself or for my company.

The corporate myth maintains that talented individuals will leave the company if they are denied these excessive bribes. In other words, if I promise never to pay anyone more than average income, all the executives in my company will quit. Enter collective bargaining: if all the companies around me make the same promise, where shall the overpriced executives go? They will find themselves thankful when they have an income at all, and their job satisfaction will come from good performance, not from bribes.

It is essential not to have an underclass of people who are so desperate that they will compete against (undersell) each other and force wages down. At the other end of the payscale, it is important not to let companies compete against each other to force elitist wages up!

Employers, unite! For starters, if we all pledge that no family will receive total compensation more than double the median household income, grossly excessive salaries are gone. The saved resources provide for research, increase starting salaries, improve working conditions, and lower prices--in other words, they raise the standard of living in society at large.

Since the formula really is so simple, it is tempting to find targets to blame. However, blame is not a constructive mindset; it is akin to cursing the darkness. Lighting a candle is overcoming the present disease at all levels, focusing on improvement. First, parents teach children to reciprocate parental love and generosity. Families provide the earliest environment for acting out empathy. Schoolteachers elucidate ways to collaborate and not to compete. Graduates refuse to be paid more than average total compensation. It then follows that united employers keep the above pledge to pay no more than average income. As a mathematical consequence, without fabrication of nonexistent imaginary resources, nobody is paid less than average income.

These positive steps can be accomplished without conformist utopian institutions and without the tyranny of government coercion. They are to be implemented by the voluntary good will of the people who will benefit the most: all of us! It has been said there are two kinds of Americans--those who are rich and those who plan to become rich. That individual mindset prevents achieving an egalitarian society through techniques such as progressive taxation. The cure begins with the pledge "I will never be rich." Fortified with that foundation, we do not depend on government to legislate our morality.

All right, back to my original question: Fellow Americans, do we really hate each other? When will we love each other enough to collaborate? Our happiness awaits.