

Abolish Slavery!

Part IV

Conscription is quite obviously the most blatant example of slavery in American life, and happily many voices from both Left and Right are now being raised to call for abolition of this unmitigated despoiler of liberty. But there are other critical and pervasive examples of slavery on the American scene that have, for some reason, gone unnoticed even among dedicated libertarians.

One vital example is the armed forces itself. For even a volunteer army practices slavery on a grand scale! It is true that a volunteer army draws its recruits by free choice of the men who enlist. But what happens after they enlist? Suppose that a man enlists in the army for five years. Suppose that after two years he becomes fed up with the regimentation of military life and decides to quit for a better job? Can he do so? Certainly not! In every other occupation in society, a man may quit his job whenever he wants to, and either take another job or quit working altogether. Surely this right is fundamental to a free society; without the right to quit, a man is a slave, even if he originally took the job purely voluntarily. But an enlistee in the armed forces is not allowed to quit before his term expires. If he tries to, he is court-martialed and jailed under harsh military law. This is forced labor and involuntary servitude, however one looks at it.

There are other occupations, too, where a man may sign a contract to work for a term of years; he may, for example, sign on for five years as a geologist to work in Arabia. But he is allowed to quit; he may be considered

a moral leper if he thus breaks his contract, he may be blacklisted by other firms hiring geologists, but he is not incarcerated for doing so.

Contrast, then, the armed forces with a very similar kind of occupation: the local police force. A man is free to quit the police force any time he wishes; why then should he not be free to quit the army as well? The armed forces will be centers of slavery not only so long as the draft exists, but even further, so long as a man is forced to stay in the army for any length of time after he decides he would rather call it a day.

No man is free if he does not have the right to quit his job. No one denies this right in every occupation — but one: in the armed forces, where this quitting is called “desertion” and met with imprisonment or even the firing squad.

If we would call ourselves a free country, this system must be abolished.