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True Civil Libertarians Must Oppose the IRS

Progressives who work to end individual rights violations committed by the NSA, FBI, DEA, CIA, and other federal agencies usually overlook, or even support, the routine violations of Americans' rights by the IRS.

For example, progressives rarely, if ever, speak out against the IRS's targeting of the opponents of those in power. When liberal Democrats control the White House, the IRS targets advocates of free markets. When hawkish Republicans are in power, the IRS targets antiwar activists.



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The Democrats' election reform legislation would require political organizations to divulge their top donors. Such donor disclosure requirements can be, and have been, used to intimidate donors from supporting "controversial" causes. Yet the requirements are supported by many progressives in the name of getting big money out of politics.

In order to "pay for" their massive spending schemes, President Biden and his congressional allies are planning a huge increase in the IRS budget. The declared purpose is to enable the tax agency to bring in to the government much more money by ramping up efforts to identify and punish those not paying the "proper" amount of taxes.

The tax code's complexity guarantees many innocent Americans will be caught in the IRS's expanded net. Yet progressives will support this because they favor the new social programs the new revenue will finance, and because they believe the IRS will only target billionaires and big corporations.

The truth is that most of the new revenue will be collected from middle-and-working-class Americans. These Americans will be targeted because, unlike billionaires and big corporations, middle-and-working-class Americans cannot afford legions of tax lawyers and accountants to level the playing field between them and the tax agency. They are more likely to simply give in to the IRS's demands.

Waiters and waitresses may even be subjected to audits to ensure they are paying taxes on their tips.

Another frightening proposal is for the government to impose a "mileage tax" to fund highway construction. A mileage tax would require government to keep track of how many miles every American drives. Some claim that a mileage tax can be implemented without creating a massive new system of government surveillance. Even if this were true, anyone who expects the government not to use this new power for nefarious purposes needs to Google Edward Snowden.

Progressives' blind spot toward IRS abuses of liberty is rooted in their belief that one can separate "economic" liberties from "civil" liberties. This allows them to support an abusive tax system to fund a welfare state (and, for an increasing number of progressives, a warfare state) while opposing other infringements on liberty. These progressives are the mirror image of conservatives who defend economic liberty while supporting government infringements on personal lifestyle choices. One of the most urgent tasks of those who wish to restore a free society in all areas is to end the artificial distinction between economic and civil liberties. By defending all liberty — no matter if it is classified as



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economic liberty or civil liberty — we can best protect against violations of any liberties.

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