

The Oldest Rhetorical Trick in the Book

In his brilliant 1956 collection, [*Minority Report*](#), H.L. Mencken stated:

If you were against the New Deal and its wholesale buying of pauper votes, then you were against Christian charity. If you were against the gross injustices and dishonesties of the Wagner Labor Act, then you were against labor. If you were against packing the Supreme Court, then you were in favor of letting Wall Street do it. If you are against using Dr. Quack's cancer salve, then you are in favor of letting Uncle Julius die. If you are against Holy Church, or Christian Science, then you are against god. It is an old, old argument.

It's an old, old argument indeed – and one, despite its evident fallaciousness, still widely wielded and fallen for.

If you are against trade restrictions, you are against workers and high wages. If you are against minimum wages, you are against the poor. If you are against paid family leave, then you are against families. If you are against Obamacare, then you are against affordable health care. If you are against government-set safety standards, then you are for letting people be poisoned and slaughtered indiscriminately.

If you are against easy money, then you are for recessions.

If you are against government-provided schooling, then you are against the education of the masses. If you are against American militarism, then you are against world peace and for evil dictators. If you are against the 'war on drugs,' then you are for widespread dissoluteness and dissipation. If you are against licensing requirements for hair-braiders, then you are for people having to suffer bad hairdos. The list can be extended indefinitely.

And it works, of course, with equal fallaciousness in the other direction. If you are for same-sex marriage, then you are against traditional families. If you are for legalizing prostitution, then you are against morality. If you are for cutting taxes, then you are against equality. If you are for *Citizens United*, then you are against democracy. This list, too, can be extended indefinitely.

Editor's Note: See also this relevant quote from The Law by Frédéric Bastiat

Socialism, like the ancient ideas from which it springs, confuses the distinction between government and society. As a result of this, every time we object to a thing being done by government, the socialists conclude that we object to its being done at all. We disapprove of state education. Then the socialists say that we are opposed to any education. We object to a state religion. Then the socialists say that we want no religion at all. We object to a state-enforced equality. Then they say that we are against equality. And so on, and so on. It is as if the socialists were to accuse us of not wanting persons to eat because we do not want the state to raise grain."

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