

# Tony suffered the 'public good'

*"The activities of the individual must not be allowed to clash with the interests of the community, but must take place within its confines and be for the good of all. The common good (must come) before the individual good."*

*—from the platform of the German Nazi Party*

Jim  
Harris



Tony Hodo was that all-too-rare figure: a successful black entrepreneur. For over 23 years, the 63-year old Hodo operated a barber shop in downtown Columbus, Georgia in a building purchased with profits from his business.

Hodo's barber shop no longer exists, however. The building stands vacant.

Not that Hodo was losing money. Quite the contrary.

Business was good.

No, Hodo was forced out of business by the very people supposedly committed to protecting him: the Columbus city government.

Hodo's shop, you see, was in an area being renovated by a coalition of government and private developers. Hodo's barber shop didn't fit in with their plans for the area.

So last year the Columbus Housing Authority began condemnation proceedings to acquire his property. They offered him "fair market value": \$13,000.00. After going to court, he received a larger amount—but still lost his property.

Hodo was hurt and angry. He had planned to work at his shop several more years, then rent the building and enjoy the income in his retirement.

Now those plans were destroyed.

"They're not buying. They're taking," Hodo told a **Columbus Ledger-Enquirer** reporter at the time. "They're taking my life's works and savings."

I thought of Tony Hodo recently as I watched the Georgia House debate a bill to make government agencies and utilities pay legal fees for landowners

who successfully challenge the amounts offered them for their condemned property.

Several legislators passionately defended the measure. House Speaker Tom Murphy urged support for the bill to protect "the hopes and dreams" of landowners.

I suppose the bill, if passed, might do some good. But not nearly enough. If the Legislature is really serious about protecting the "hopes and dreams" of property owners, it should get rid of the laws that wreck those dreams. Specifically, they should abolish the law of eminent domain.

The process of eminent domain—condemnation—shows government at its ugliest. Taking someone's property against their will is no different from armed robbery—no matter who does it, no matter how it is justified.

It's even worse when—as frequently happens—the property is taken in order to benefit private businesses or other private concerns.

The most often-heard justification for eminent domain is that sometimes the rights of some individuals must be sacrificed to benefit the public good.

But what a monstrous principle that is! It amounts to nothing less

than the abolition of individual rights. Once "the public good"—as determined by politicians and bureaucrats—becomes the standard by which our actions are judged, then individual freedom is dead. All rights can be shoved aside "for the public good."

We see exactly that principle at work in countries like the Soviet Union, where dissenters are imprisoned and killed "for the public good." It was embodied in Nazi Germany, where Jews were executed "for the public good."

And, sadly, we all too often see it in action here in America, whenever people are stripped of their homes and businesses in the name of "the public good."

Certainly it might sometimes be more difficult to construct highways, or to pursue other construction projects, without condemnation. Some building projects might be more costly—or occasionally even impossible—because of stubborn property owners.

But that's a small price to pay for freedom. Indeed, such inconveniences would be monuments to our society—testimonies to our devotion to the sanctity of the individual and his property.

(Continued on P5A)

## Tony

(Continued from P4A)

Instead, today all too many construction projects are monuments only to the government's contempt for individuals and their property rights.

Incidentally, several years ago Tony Hodo began to worry that downtown urban renewal might one day force him to relocate. So he bought another piece of property in a different section of Columbus.

What happened to that property?

You guessed it.

It was seized a few years ago for another urban renewal project.