

Selected Articles from the SIF Newsletter October 1991

Society for Individual Freedom

Since 2002, each new issue of the SIF's journal, *The Individual*, has been uploaded onto the SIF's website at www.individualist.org.uk as a PDF file. Before that, online availability was very limited.

To remedy this, we have reconstructed back-issues of the journal using only the core articles. We hope that you will find them of interest. Any comments should be directed to the current editor of *The Individual* at editor@individualist.org.uk.

Please note that views expressed herein are not necessarily those of the SIF but are printed as a contribution to debate.

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FREEDOM FROM OBSCENE PUBLICATIONS?

David Webb

This was the topic of the talk on 23rd October 1990 given by David Webb, Honorary Director of the National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts. Here is a summary of his remarks.

The Campaign was established in 1976 after the acquittal of the publisher of *Inside Linda Lovelace* a novel based on the film *Deep Throat*. Like many trials for obscenity, this one was costly for the public purse, good publicity for the book and profitable for its publisher. In the following years many countries have relaxed their laws on obscene publications but Britain has strengthened hers by the Indecent Displays (Control) Act (1981), the Cinematograph (Amendment) Act (1982), the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (1982), the Video Recordings Act (1984) and the Broadcasting Act (1990). British concern about 'obscenity' and 'indecent' is associated with the widespread view that sexual behaviour is inherently dirty and disgusting - and also with a tendency towards hypocrisy. Countless prosecutions show that although Mrs Thatcher was right to say on 31st October 1989 that "freedom of expression is a fundamental part of a free society" she was wrong to say "We're way ahead of most other countries in our liberty, in our

freedom, in our openness". This is not a matter of party politics: Labour MPs have recently sponsored bills to stop newspapers from publishing 'page 3' photographs of women and to limit very repressively the location and sale of publications that some people consider pornographic. Some feminists want to suppress completely sexual material involving women unless it conforms strictly to their stringent criteria.

Yes interest in sex is perfectly natural and instinctive, like the interest in food. Sexually explicit books are no worse than cookery books and books extolling gastronomic pleasures. The latter are not banned because people may overeat with harmful consequences; why should the former, which are mostly used as a stimulus, to achieving orgasm by masturbation? Experience abroad has shown that the removal of legal censorship restraints on sexually explicit material does not lead to an increase in sexual crime. Freedom of expression does not include the right to cause real proven harm but it does include the right to offend – if nothing can be said that might offend somebody then hardly anything could be said or shown. It is sometimes a very good thing to offend – and often even necessary.

MORAL IGNORANCE: THE BASIS OF COMMUNISM

David Wedgwood

This was the theme of the talk given by David Wedgwood on the 25th July 1990. Here is a summary.

'The world is round' was an outrageous truth in its day. 'If Heaven is up there and Hell down there, it cannot be round and solid' was yesterday's invincible ignorance.

Ever since man's division of labour, slums were where the unfit, by natural (market) selection, died

of starvation and disease. This was the excretory mechanism of every healthy and progressive society. This is today's outrageous truth. 'Man has now risen about animals' is a self-esteem illusion, today's invincible ignorance (nothing can be more than what it is).

Philosophers, politicians, and 'the media' gain popularity by obfuscating, with popular nonsense, the cognitive dissonance some truths generate. One popular nonsense is the view that compassion

is enforceable by government taxation, i.e. the welfare state.

Another obfuscation that might have already occurred to you is that the 'market' that I referred to is a human creation. Firstly the market is the essence of natural selection. If there is a surplus of greenfly, then there is a demand for ladybirds, which flourish. Supply and demand is the essence of the market. Secondly, man is a thing of nature, so everything he is and does is a part of nature. Denial of this is a statement of acceptance that man is above nature, i.e. supernatural, which I cannot accept. This also brings us back to self-esteem, which philosophers, politicians, and 'the media' massage to obtain power and profit. Man is an animal, and nothing more.

"You can fool all of the people some of the time and some of the people all of the time." All the

people were fooled into accepting that the world was flat. This ignorance was invincible for a long time. Human rights to the welfare state are genetically decadent, economically decadent (all rights reduce freedom of contract) but above all morally decadent. The proud struggling poor become lazy welfare scroungers (and thieves) and the compassion of the rich, not being stimulated by abject poverty, turns to hate of those lazy welfare scroungers. All the people have been fooled into accepting ignorance of this truth for a long time. The time will come when this ignorance ceases to be invincible.

The economic ignorance which underlies communism is no longer invincible in the USSR and enlightenment spreads remarkably quickly. The problem is that the moral ignorance which also underlies communism remains invincible, because it also underlies human rights to welfare.

ORDER AS THE BEDROCK OF FREEDOM

Professor David Marsland

This was the topic of the talk on 26th September 1990 given by Professor David Marsland. Here is a summary of his remarks: the full text appears in the September 1990 issue of *The Salisbury Review*.

Since 1979, substantial progress away from collectivism has been achieved. There is a long way still to go on the road to freedom, particularly in regard to dismantling the welfare state, but we have abandoned the road to serfdom. There is, however, a grave threat that our freedom might easily be lost unless we recognise that freedom presupposes order and that our liberties rest on a bedrock of values and institutions that need defending.

Everyone who is committed in principle to freedom should acknowledge the indispensable need for order in society, speak up for those who defend it, and campaign actively against those who mischievously subvert it. For unless we defend good order against those who demand more rights without commensurate responsibilities, the democratic societies of the Free World will be overwhelmed by decadent licence, and our liberties will be snuffed out by authoritarian rule. The order which liberty

depends on requires defence at four different levels: national security; internal law and order; sub-cultural deviance and; fundamental values.

First, the Free World has done well to keep up its defences until the communist enemy has surrendered. Nor should we relax now. We should continue to maintain a powerful defensive posture against whatever enemy - of Britain and of freedom - may appear.

Second, law and order, and the forces which maintain them, should receive active support from lovers of freedom. The system of law and order in free societies should be powerful, coherent and effective.

Third, we should resist deviance. In combination with the unrelenting, unresisted pressure since the 1960s for the continuous expansion of rights, the idea that variations in human conduct should be judged purely relatively, in terms as it were of their aesthetic contribution to the infinite mosaic of kaleidoscopic life-styles which democratic culture supposedly comprises, has done serious damage to

the orderliness of social relations without which freedom is not easily assured. Pluralism is one thing: a smorgasbord of subcultural incoherence is quite another. In sexual orientations and relations, family structures, religious beliefs, attitudes to work, concepts of money, educational standards, ethics and morals, concepts of Britain's past and Britain's future, across the board, we have fooled ourselves into believing that anything or almost anything goes.

It seems to me, then, that one important aspect of the social order upon which freedom unavoidably trades is a certain modest limitation – considerably beyond what is legally prohibited, but modest nonetheless - on the range of customarily allowable conduct, and a degree of reliable conformity by the whole population with the ordinary patterns of normal conduct thus prescribed. Within the limits of this consensual order and within the parameters of this conformity, genuine freedom allows for variation and innovation sufficient to satisfy all but obsessive antinomians and professional mischief-makers.

Fourth, honesty, hard work, humility, competitive aspiration, prudence, self-reliance, enterprising initiative - we might each make a long list of our basic values. There would be differences, even some conflict, between the lists, but I suspect there would be a crucial common core. To transmit these values is the business of families and schools. We must no longer tolerate weakened and deformed families; schools must again undertake their task of civilising barbarians. However, the moral order cannot bind children and young people if adults can escape its liberating control. Here the media are crucial. Their role in subverting the moral order on which freedom in Britain entirely depends can hardly be overstated. The current bill on balance in television should be the beginning of really radical reform.

The free society is characterised by democracy, capitalism, and personal freedom. All three stand on the indispensable bedrock constituted by territorial, legal, social, and moral order. Wherever order in any of these four spheres is substantially weakened, democracy, capitalism, personal freedom cannot long or easily survive.

THE ABOLITION OF INCOME TAX

Dr Barry Bracewell-Milnes

This was the topic of a talk given by Dr Barry Bracewell-Milnes on the 28th November 1990. Here is a summary.

The Institute of Directors had published a paper earlier in the autumn under the title *Continuing Tax Reform: A Long-Term Strategy for Government Spending and Taxation*. He had been the principal author of this paper, which was of full book length.

The theme of the paper was that not only taxes on capital but also taxes on income were voluntary, in the sense that they could be abolished over a generation or less even at existing or higher levels of government spending, if only the will were there. The argument was costed in the paper in detail.

It was an apparent paradox that the tax burden, as measured by the ratio of total tax revenue to gross domestic product, had risen by about half a per-

centage point per year since the present Government had come to power. How was this possible when the Government had reduced many tax rates, including the basic rate of income tax from 33% to 25%?

The answer was that a number of 'disproportionalities' were built into the system to the advantage of the Treasury: as gross domestic product grew, total tax revenue grew faster. There were a number of different reasons for this. Perhaps the most important was that income tax allowances were indexed for inflation but not for earnings: as 'real' (or inflation-adjusted) earnings rose, a smaller proportion of earned incomes was covered by allowances and a larger proportion was subject to the basic and higher rates of income tax. This phenomenon of disproportionality was sometimes known as 'fiscal drag', because it acted as a drag on the economy unless counteracted.

Fiscal drag was big money and was acknowledged as such by the Treasury. In a normal year it might be conservatively estimated at £1 billion to £2 billion. (A penny off the basic rate of income tax costs about £2 billion.) In a year of high growth fiscal drag was worth much more: it was estimated at £6 billion by Nigel Lawson in his Budget speech of 1988.

The way the political and parliamentary system worked was that the proceeds of fiscal drag were mostly absorbed by the government to increase its spending or redeem its debt. That was what had happened since 1979. That was why the tax burden had risen since 1979 by about 5 percentage points, from some 32% to 37%. This was a heavy increase in tax burden for the large majority of the population and was an additional cost of £500 a year to someone with a typical present income of £10,000.

Under the present institutions, the taxpayer always came last in the queue. The proceeds of growth in the tax base were largely appropriated by the government in taxation. Lobbies for additional government spending were allowed to dominate the scene and the interests of the taxpayer were neglected. A major ingredient in the correction of this state of affairs would be a growing recognition of the truth that, over a period of a generation or less, taxes on income and especially capital were not necessary evils but wounds self-inflicted by the body politic on the economy and society.
