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- A reassessment of British education

FAREWELL TO LORD MONSON

Readers of *The Individual* may already have read of the death in February of the SIF's President, Lord Monson. I say "may" because the relative lack of coverage given to the life and death of such a man – a member of the House of Lords held in such esteem by his colleagues that he was one of the 92 hereditary peers to survive the *House of Lords Act* in 1999 – was a scandal.

This is even more so when one considers the grisly array of fawning obituaries of communist and fellow-travelling "intellectuals" and others that even *The Times* seems delighted to print. Nevertheless, Dr Helen Szamuely, a friend to both Lord Monson and the SIF, does him justice in her article that starts this issue.

Sadly, the position of President of the SIF is now vacant. Filling it may become part of the wider review of the SIF's structure and activities – or lack thereof – that we accept is now long overdue.

This issue of *The Individual* contains another in the series of Peter Richards' brief histories and biographies. I am delighted to report that a number of Mr Richards' articles, often first published by the SIF and/or the Libertarian Alliance, have been collected into a

book, *Free-born John Lilburne: English Libertarian: And Other Essays on Liberty*, and published by the Book Guild Ltd. According to the online shopping website Amazon, this should be available by the time that this journal is published.

A number of people have taken the trouble to praise Professor Alice Coleman's article on education that appeared in the previous issue of *The Individual*. Not least has been Dr Jeremy Dunning-Davies who has picked up the baton on this matter.

On a personal level and, as it were, cross-party basis, I'd like to offer my belated congratulations to Dr Maurice Glasman (as-was) on his – even by his own admission – surprise elevation to the House of Lords as Baron Glasman of Stoke Newington and of Stamford Hill in the London Borough of Hackney. The author of the concept of "blue Labour" – a conservative, communitarian version of socialism – he will sit as a Labour peer.

Long-suffering readers of *The Individual* might recall that I wrote an article in the May 2002 issue – subsequently slightly revised and re-

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JOHN MONSON, 11TH BARON MONSON, 1932-2011: A REAL LIBERAL

Dr Helen Szamuely

Writing obituaries is a sad business, particularly about someone, in this case Lord Monson, the freedom campaigner, as the *Daily Telegraph*¹ so rightly called him, whom I knew well and with whom I have worked in the House of Lords.

Melissa Kite's article, quoted above, sums up Lord Monson's activity reasonably well though somewhat superficially. So far there has been no obituary, presumably because active in many different fields, Lord Monson eschewed personal publicity and was not known to many hacks.

Among other things he was a confirmed EU withdrawalist, though he also believed that our own government should also get out of people's lives, a man who opposed surrender to the IRA, a stalwart fighter against the hunting ban, the President of the Society for Individual Freedom, a trustee of the Centre for Research into Post-Communist Economies and others, too numerous to mention.

I first met Lord Monson at the very beginning of the Anti-Federalist League, which later morphed into UKIP. We wanted to launch the new party in one of the House of Lords committee rooms and the rule is that such events have to be sponsored by a member of the House who has to be present. For various reasons the peer whom Alan Sked had asked could not attend so he, in turn, asked Lord Monson to do so. Without knowing any of us (though he did recognize my surname and told me that he had read my father's articles) Lord Monson agreed because he believed in the rightness of the cause. Subsequently, in the 1992 election he persuaded a number of people to vote for the AFL as he could not vote himself.

It was Lord Monson who sponsored my pass to the Lords in order for me to do the research and briefs for various peers; he was among the most trenchant speakers in all the debates over Maastricht, Amsterdam, Nice, the Constitution and Lisbon. Generally speaking, his approach was from the point of view of individual freedom as a cursory glance through his contributions would show. There are not that many people even in the Lords, let alone the Commons, who believe in old-fashioned liberal values but Ivan Monson did. (He asked me to call him Ivan when I first started working with him, promising to explain why and how John had transmogrified into Ivan but he never did, leaving me to guess.)

His other interests were Northern Ireland, Eastern Europe, Turkey where he went frequently and about which he knew a great deal, country sports and activities. I am not sure whether he hunted himself but I do know that he opposed the government's deep desire to control activities in the countryside and took his entire family, including very young grandchildren to the Countryside Alliance march.

My last conversation with Ivan Monson took place a couple of weeks before his death. He was in the Lords (where he had not attended much in recent months, clearly for reasons of health) but on crutches because he had had an operation on one knee and was planning to have one on the other as soon as possible. Sadly, he looked frail and tired but the chat we had was as delightful and invigorating as ever. Among other things he complained bitterly about the number of new peers this government, outdoing the last one, was appointing. They would toe the line, was his opinion. With this lot we probably could not get any Bill of Malcolm Pearson's through the Second Reading, let alone Committee stage. Sad but true.

I shall miss Ivan Monson, a very quiet, gentle but utterly strong-minded man. I am glad to say, however, that arrangements are being made for me to continue work in the House of Lords, about which I shall go on reporting.

Note

(1) Melissa Kite, 'Freedom campaigner Lord Monson dies aged 78', *Daily Telegraph*, 12th February 2011, <http://tinyurl.com/6dn5txc>.

About the author

Dr Helen Szamuely is writer, researcher and broadcaster. This obituary is a slightly revised version of the one that first appeared on her *Your Freedom and Ours* blog, <http://yourfreedomandours.blogspot.com>, on the 17th February 2011.

"There are not that many people even in the Lords, let alone the Commons, who believe in old-fashioned liberal values but Ivan Monson did."

FURTHER THOUGHTS ON EDUCATION

Dr Jeremy Dunning-Davies

Introduction

The recent article by Professor Alice Coleman (*The Individual*, no. 55, February 2011, pp. 11-19) should not be allowed to go unheralded by those who, like her, wish to see a return to all round academic excellence in the British educational system. However, the article itself contained so much common sense and so much truth which has been systematically hidden for many years it is difficult to know where to begin. Here by truth I refer to those actual facts relating to education itself and educational practice which have been buried from view by those with an agenda which cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, have the best interests of this country at heart. Like me, Professor Coleman will remember when this country's education led the world. However, in the intervening years various measures have been introduced under a wide variety of guises which have had the effect of lowering standards in all sectors of education slowly and steadily. It is not, I think, too strong a sentiment to feel that the actions to which I refer amount to nothing less than a form of treason; maybe not treason in a legal sense but certainly treason in a moral sense.

Professor Coleman's comprehensive article covered too many individual points for me to comment on each one separately. Hence I would like to concentrate on a few topics about which I have some personal knowledge before extending to consider consequences in the university sector.

Reading

At first sight it might seem a little odd for a retired university science lecturer to comment on the teaching of reading. However, my parents were both junior school teachers as is my wife so, although the knowledge is second hand, I do have quite a long acquaintance with the teaching of reading; more particularly through growing up in South Wales in a time when a lot of the dangerous nonsense associated with the teaching of this most vital of basic skills was introduced. My father was Headmaster of Barry Island School in South Wales for twenty-six years and, during that time, had not one pupil leave his school unable to read. Of course, all children were taught by what Professor Coleman refers to as the 'traditional phonics' method. It was, though, during this time that the so-called 'look and say' method was introduced, accompanied by the complete abandonment of the phonic approach. My godfather, another local junior school headmaster had immediate problems with his intake from the feeding

infant school and, in fact, my mother rescued the son of a close family friend by teaching him privately utilising the phonic approach.

It was at about this time that the popular use of the term dyslexia came into general use as an excuse for children being unable to read. The experience of my own father and his colleagues completely supports the views expressed by Professor Coleman; in fact, my own father's not inconsiderable experience was exactly in line with the primary head referred to in the article in connection with the Tizard enquiry. There is absolutely no doubt about the validity of the claim that dyslexic illiteracy can be eliminated completely by a return to using true phonics. However, to do this, the educational establishment must be guided by such as Professor Coleman and people, such as Mona McNee, that she has mentioned; it must steer clear of the false prophets that surround us and have wormed their way into positions of authority in order to subvert the good intentions of those attempting to improve our presently appalling educational system.

Being a scientist, I have always had an interest in the teaching of mathematics. Also, this was my own father's area of considerable expertise. Having experienced his mathematics teaching first hand, I can certainly vouch for this. In recent years, he spoke to my wife who mentioned a book/method for mathematics teaching in the early stages which she had found excellent. It emerged that this book/method, first published long after he had formulated his own technique, mirrored that technique quite well. This is the book *Children Discover Arithmetic* by Catherine Stern. However, apart from that, it is always vitally important to remember that, in elementary mathematics or arithmetic, a detailed knowledge of tables and number bonds is paramount. By 'detailed knowledge of tables' is meant not only knowing the table itself but also knowing each individual fact both ways around and as both a multiplication and division fact.

Of course, the so-called 'experts' claim learning this material is boring and everything should be made 'fun'. It must be remembered though that, while adults might find such learning boring, that is not necessarily the case with children of the appropriate age. In any case, it must be accepted that, in order to achieve anything worthwhile in any field, practice is necessary. No doubt even the most talented young musician finds constant practice boring on occasions but ultimately recognises that the end result made that practice worth-

"... it must be accepted that, in order to achieve anything worthwhile in any field, practice is necessary."

while. It has always struck me as funny that so many education gurus seem to accept that such practice is acceptable for subjects like music or ballet but not for such as mathematics. This realisation leads, interestingly enough, to the subject of secondary education and Professor Coleman's comments relating to the 11+ examination.

Secondary Education

In one authority of which I have personal knowledge, at the same time as they were doing away with their grammar schools, they were arranging funding for a talented local ballet dancer to go to study at the Bolshoi ballet school. What an interesting situation to have arisen! The authority concerned was quite willing to select a local dancer by talent at a young age but *not* a talented local mathematician or physicist. This is, to me, a perfect example of the double standards these progressive educationalists display and it why I prefer to refer to them as subversives rather than progressives because all their actions ultimately betray a desire to harm this country and its future.

The 11+ was a perfect example of how they operate in that they picked on a topic which was guaranteed, if handled properly, to bring tremendous electoral benefit to the party that adopted it initially; such benefit, in fact, that no party could oppose it except at the very real risk of enormous political harm at the ballot box. Yes; there were injustices with the 11+. No system is perfect or ever can be. However, safeguards could be built in as they were in Glamorgan. In the days of the 11+ in Glamorgan, pupils who had gained entry to the grammar school could be transferred to a secondary modern school after a year if they made insufficient progress. Similarly, secondary modern pupils who did extremely well could be transferred to the local grammar school. I know from my father's experiences that this system worked very well with one pupil who should never have failed the 11+ but, for some unknown reason performed badly on the day of the examination, moving to the grammar school a year later.

He also found, incidentally, that the system had the desirable effect of administering a sharp shock to those who, once they'd reached grammar school, thought they'd arrived and there was no more need to work. This happened with at least one pupil and, after being transferred to a secondary modern for a year during which he restarted working properly, was returned to the grammar school.

However, personally, although I would support reintroducing grammar schools, I would not reintroduce the old 11+. Rather I would support the reintroduction of the system I experienced myself. At any point between the ages of ten and a half and twelve and a half, pupils took the scholarship

examination which consisted of four papers. In the morning one sat a mental mathematics paper followed by a written arithmetic paper on which there were twelve questions from simple arithmetic to a variety of problems. After lunch, one wrote an essay chosen from a given list of subjects, followed by a comprehension and grammar paper. There was then a set number of places at the local grammar schools and these were filled by those people at the top of the list. Hence, it was impossible to remove grammar schools by claiming that no-one had passed, as happened in one authority of which I have knowledge.

No system would be perfect but fine tuning could bring it near to perfection so long as personal power could not be brought to bear to bring about an injustice. I mention this final point because the interchange system introduced in Glamorgan with the 11+ failed when a county councillor successfully stopped her own son being transferred from grammar school to a secondary modern school when he simply hadn't worked. This sort of action is something against which the authorities would have to guard.

Discipline

Whenever the word discipline is mentioned, it is assumed immediately that reference is being made to 'corporal punishment'. This is, of course, a reaction born out of conditioning by progressives over many years. What is forgotten immediately is that, in all walks of life, self-discipline is vitally important and that quality is acquired to a great extent from discipline imposed by others. Returning once again to the example of the budding young musician, it is obvious that any talent that young person may have will only come to bloom as a result of long and hard practice and that will necessitate a huge amount of self-discipline born out of imposed discipline.

However, nowadays discipline is almost a dirty word in the eyes of so many education gurus. It seems fun has to be the order of the day. However, indiscipline is now rife in the nation's schools and in many of those schools the result is that the pupils rule. If a teacher opposes their will, one possible and not infrequent outcome is an official complaint against that teacher. Such a complaint, however ludicrous, can lead to a case against the teacher in a Crown Court because we also have in place in this country a totally unfounded belief – also introduced by the progressives and totally believed by so many in the police and social services – that children do not lie. Children do lie! Children know that, if they make accusations, they will be believed and the teacher will be guilty until proven innocent, – a situation which is supposed to be contrary to the basics of our legal system but, where schoolchildren are concerned, it seems those rules apply no longer. This again helps produce a culture of indiscipline

“... discipline is almost a dirty word in the eyes of so many education gurus. It seems fun has to be the order of the day.”

in our schools, a culture which is spreading rapidly into our junior schools after having taken control in a large percentage of our secondary schools.

Of course, as Professor Coleman so rightly highlights, too many of our schools are quite simply too big. In smaller establishments it would be easier to retain control but even there to do so would require a change in attitude and approach on the part of the authorities. Included here in the term ‘authorities’ would, of course, be the police, the CPS and all legal bodies involved, including the judiciary; all of them would have to readjust to a realisation that ‘children lie’ and, when they do in court, must be found to be in contempt in the same way that an adult would, and should, be found.

Professor Coleman also referred in her article to the use of corporal punishment in schools in days gone by. Should it be reintroduced or not? There is little doubt that people hold strong views on this subject, and in both extreme camps. However, it is interesting to reflect on the background to the abolition of corporal punishment. At the time a small, seemingly ineffective, teaching union was established whose prime aim was the abolition of corporal punishment. The union’s theme was that only a poor teacher needed to resort to corporal punishment. As is obvious, this was a truly clever ploy since no-one wants to appear to admit to being poor to anything. Hence, on this topic, the small union became very powerful and successful.

Unfortunately, when corporal punishment was abolished, no-one had any suggestions on what to use as a replacement. The whole tragic tale reminds one of what happened in a South Wales school when a new headmaster arrived. The new head stood up in the first assembly, announced that there would be no more corporal punishment in the school and, to emphasise his point, broke a cane across his knee with a great flourish. From that moment on, chaos reigned in that school. Once again, no thought had been given to that vital question of with what to replace that form of punishment. Of course, it has to be admitted that, in the old days, there were numerous examples of people abusing the use of the cane and some schools had bigger records of canings than of academic successes. Nevertheless, when you abolish something, regardless of the reasons, you must consider first with what to replace it. This was never done with the school punishment issue and the end result is clearly there for all to see – chaos in so many of our schools.

Public examinations

It is a relatively short time ago that secondary school pupils faced the school certificate and higher school certificate examinations but most

today will remember the old A-levels and O-levels. When the O-levels were combined with the old CSE examinations to form the new GCSEs, everyone in the know saw an immediate drop in level, as there was bound to be considering the totally different levels of the two separate ingredients.

However, at all times, the public has been assured of a continued governmental adherence to the ‘gold standard’ of A-levels. This must rate one of the bigger governmental confidence tricks of recent times. The academic level of A-levels has fallen continually and the introduction of modules has simply exacerbated this decline. If I may take physics, about which I know a little, as an example. Students simply do not get through the basic material necessary to embark on a genuine university physics course. They often study modules on topics such as astrophysics and medical physics but do so without the background knowledge necessary for a true understanding of those subjects. Of course, when they go up to university, they are faced with the university department having to fill in the gaps and, having seemed to study such ‘glamorous’ topics as relativity and quantum mechanics at A-level, many claim to be bored with this return to fundamentals in first year at university. The truth is that subjects such as physics and mathematics should be studied sequentially. Students should learn the basics at school and move on to these other topics when they are fully prepared so that they can study them effectively.

It follows that much of this present discussion of A-levels is following the wrong path. It is the syllabi of the existing A-levels which should be being examined, not the whole A-level structure itself. Three genuinely good science A-levels is ideal preparation for any university physics course, the same is true of mathematics and, I suspect, for most other good academic university science degree courses. However, both physics and mathematics suffer from the same basic problem at A-level and that is that the syllabi are inadequate, not that there is anything basically wrong with the A-level concept itself. This is to me an easily proved claim when I think of the content of my own mathematics A-level and look at my own A-level physics notes.

Universities

It has to be acknowledged that the universities themselves do little to help the situation, probably because they have been deeply infiltrated by large numbers of the subversives to whom Professor Coleman refers. Indeed, many of these in our universities are those who train or, more correctly, indoctrinate those who go out into our schools and administrations to wreak yet more havoc in our educational system. It is even more worrying to realise that some of these have been, or maybe

“The academic level of A-levels has fallen continually...”

still are, agents of foreign powers and this raises very real and very serious questions about the actual intentions of such people. However, the end result is yet more harm to our education system and this bodes ill for our country.

Before there is any more debate, however, the first thing that should be decided is the actual topic for debate. I would suggest that the topic should be the question: *“What is a university?”* I would suggest further that, once that question is answered honestly, everything else immediately falls into place.

My contention is that we have far too many universities and that many of the courses these institutions supply are nowhere near academic enough to warrant the award of a degree. Many of the institutions, in my view, were serving a far more useful purpose before they were allowed to attain what they see as the exalted status of a university! However, the massive expense occasioned by their existence has to be covered and the solution adopted is to increase student fees to £9,000 per annum.

I am not convinced that this is the correct route to follow for a variety of reasons. I would much prefer to see the country supporting those students who are intending to study genuinely worthwhile academic subjects, subjects whose study will eventually benefit the country as well as the actual student. On top of this I find myself extremely worried at the way in which universities actually spend the money they receive. I cannot speak generally about universities on this as my experience is limited but I am sure practices similar to those I will mention occur in many and they would indicate great room for savings! Many older universities used to have just one pro-vice-chancellor and he was often an older professor who carried out the extra duties for a small honorarium. In later years that number increased. Now, however, in at least one instance, the university has three pro-vice-chancellors and a deputy vice-chancellor, all paid salaries in excess, I suspect, of £100,000. This is typical of the unnecessary increase in administration which is costing a fortune.

Again, any money received by the university is, in at least one case, divided between the various faculties. The faculties then distribute money to the various departments, but the faculties then charge the departments for heating, lighting and use of rooms and so some of this money is returned. The faculties are then charged by the university for heating, lighting and use of rooms and have to return money to the centre. The end result is that people are paid real salaries to simply move money around the campus on paper. This situation is exacerbated even further by the overhead charges imposed on departments for their research contracts – a charge which is often more

than the grant awarding authorities are willing to pay purely as an overhead. Hence, departments can find themselves in the ‘red’ at the end of a research contract for this very reason. In at least one instance such action has resulted in a grade 5 department feeling itself forced to cease applying for research grants and so losing its grade 5 status. In fact, in the case in question, the department concerned exists no longer. All this is simply to support a massive central administration and one can only speculate as to why certain people were allowed so much authority to cause so much damage to an institution.

I realise that the total amount of money involved in the above is not huge but I suspect it is merely the tip of the iceberg. If it happens at one university, it will happen elsewhere and, like everyone in most walks of life, vice-chancellors will always complain about lack of resources. It might be worth contemplating advising them to ‘cut their coat according to their cloth’ rather than, once again, simply giving them even more.

The progressives seem to have been believed by members of the present government that there is a great source of untapped talent going to waste in some of the country’s poorer areas. As a bald fact, this is probably true but how you tap successfully into that resource is quite another matter. Our top universities are being told that, if they don’t tap into this resource, they will not be allowed to charge the highest fees. However, to my certain knowledge, these universities do attempt to admit students from so-called disadvantaged backgrounds. When at Cambridge, my own daughter was asked if she would be willing to talk about entry to her own college to interested pupils at schools in our home area. She agreed but had absolutely no invitations to speak. It’s very difficult to see what more her college could have done.

Colleges do really try to interest state school pupils in applying and, although some very good students from such schools do gain admittance, the numbers are not too large and probably lower than in the days of the Grammar Schools. However, how far should our best universities go to attract students from particular backgrounds? Should they really be intimidated by politicians with purely political reasons for adopting the stance they do? My personal worry about this political attitude is conditioned partly by experience – experience these politicians simply do not have.

Some years ago, a student from a so-called disadvantaged background went up to university to study for a four-year physics degree. The student concerned was potentially very good and put in first class performances in each of his first two years. In his third year, he slipped a little and only managed an upper second performance. How-

“we have far too many universities and that many of the courses these institutions supply are nowhere near academic enough to warrant the award of a degree.”

ever, in his fourth and final year, he was able to choose theoretical options and even a theoretical project. His first two years performances indicated that, if he worked, he would do extremely well in his final year and probably achieve a first class degree. In the event, he did very badly in the first semester and didn't return for the final semester. The Head of Department spent a lot of time chasing this student and, after a tremendous amount of effort, persuaded the student to return (in what would be his fifth year) to take the second semester of the final year and hence obtain a degree. However, the student again failed to complete and so, ended up without a degree, despite all the efforts to help him by members of staff. It emerged later that he failed to finish because his family put pressure on him to leave and get a job. His family did not realise that, if they'd supported him and he had achieved a good class physics degree, he would have been in a much better position to help them.

Unfortunately, this is not an untypical case and raises questions over this increase of uninformed political pressure on our better universities to admit more and more students from such backgrounds. The universities must be extremely careful over their admissions and should be allowed to exercise their own professional judgement without unwarranted and uninformed political pressure being exerted upon them.

Ofsted

Professor Coleman also drew attention to the activities of Ofsted and not without good reason. As with all organisations, I am absolutely certain there are people working for Ofsted doing a good job and doing it conscientiously but those people are being let down by some of their colleagues. A recent report I read on a small independent private school contained claims that the inspectors involved were not able to make because they hadn't checked on the topics concerned, as well as some which were blatantly untrue. If Ofsted reports are to be worth anything, they must be documents on whose validity you can rely. They are not! Hence, Ofsted is yet another body which must be reformed but, if the background of its newly appointed chief is any indication, there seems little likelihood of really worthwhile reform in the near future.

No. Professor Coleman's advice on this matter, together with her suggestions for the teacher training establishments should be accepted and acted upon as soon as is possible. This is, however, a highly dangerous area since so much subversive power rests in some of these establishments and, indeed, in some very big name institutions. In fact, Professor Coleman's suggested solution to a variety of problems of closing down the institution and, instead of handing out expensive redundancy payments, returning the person-

nel (after suitable retraining) to teaching duties in schools ruined by the policies of these very same people must rank as one of the most sensible proposals advanced for many years, and not just in education.

Conclusions

Although I have gone into topics not even mentioned in Professor Coleman's article, the entire *raison d'être* for this piece is her accurate, inspiring article which should, in my view, be compulsory reading for all MPs. Such reading should be followed immediately by the implementation of her suggestions. If the subversives are removed from power – and absolutely all of them must be – and her suggestions concerning the teaching of reading and teacher training are taken on board rapidly, then there is some hope for improvement in British education at all levels. However, the erosion has gone on for more than sixty years at least; the improvement will not come overnight. The alternative though is, in my view, hardly worth contemplating; it would involve the further erosion of our education system which was the envy of the world such a short time ago.

About the author

Dr Jeremy Dunning-Davies was born in 1941 in Glamorgan, the son of a primary school headmaster. His mother and wife were also teachers before their respective marriages and this teaching background has given Jeremy an abiding interest in education at all levels. He was appointed to the Applied Mathematics Department of Hull University in 1966, becoming a senior lecturer in 1981. In 2002, he transferred to the Physics Department at Hull.

Works include: *Mathematical Methods for Mathematicians, Physical Scientists and Engineers* (Ellis Horwood, 1982); *Concise Thermodynamics* (Albion Publishing, 1996,2007); *Exploding a Myth* (Horwood Publishing, 2007); and about 150 articles mainly on thermodynamics and its applications, particularly in astrophysics but including previous articles that appeared in the November 1996, January 2010 and February 2011 issues of *The Individual*.

“... the erosion has gone on for more than sixty years at least; the improvement will not come overnight.”



THE BRITISH EMPIRE: A STORY OF FREEDOM

Peter Richards

Introduction

On a visit to Pakistan in April 2011, David Cameron suggested that Britain was responsible for many of the world's problems. In the *Telegraph* (5th April 2011), Dr Sean Gabb of the Libertarian Alliance was reported as saying that Mr Cameron should not apologise for Britain's past. I think Dr Gabb is right. It is refreshing to hear this point of view being expressed in the mainstream media when so many public figures follow the apologetic line.

A British self-loathing attitude, reinforced as it often is by leftist propaganda, has been around for years.

Following the United Kingdom general election of 1997 at which the Labour Party led by Tony Blair won a landslide victory, the New Labour project's mission to sweep away the 'forces of conservatism' and destroy traditional British identity in order to promote multiculturalism was deliberate and politically motivated; denigrating our history was part of the strategy.

Now at last, with the Con-Lib coalition, despite comments to the contrary by its leader, we are seeing what seems to be a change in government attitude towards our past. On the 5th October 2010, the education secretary Michael Gove, in his speech to the Conservative Party conference in Birmingham, said:

Our history has moments of pride and shame, but unless we fully understand the struggles of the past we will not properly value the liberties of the present.

The current approach we have to history denies children the opportunity to hear our island story. Children are given a mix of topics at primary, a cursory run through Henry the eighth and Hitler at secondary and many give up the subject by 14, without knowing how vivid episodes of our past become a connected narrative. Well, this trashing of our past has got to stop.¹

This appears to be a significant change of approach to that of the previous wielders of power. I would like to add my voice to the debate about how we view our history by looking at the connection between the British Empire and freedom.

It is my contention that the British Empire, de-

spite its many faults, did achieve something of tremendous and lasting value. Its most important contribution to humanity, in my view, is that it spread the idea of freedom from its humble beginnings in England to many far-flung regions of the globe and to many nations of the world.

"Without freedom", Edmund Burke declared in 1766, it "would not be the British Empire."²

In this essay, I explore the links between the British Empire and freedom.

I will begin by looking at the benefits of empire and of the British Empire in particular.

Empire

There is no doubt that empires, despite the brutality with which they are often associated, often confer benefits to those living within their boundaries, as this comic sketch from Monty Python's *The Life of Brian* suggests:

Reg: All right...all right...but apart from better sanitation and medicine and education and irrigation and public health and roads and a fresh water system and baths and public order... What have the Romans done for us?

Xerxes: Brought peace!

Reg: What!? Oh... (scornfully) Peace, yes...shut up!³

The Roman Empire tends to get a more balanced assessment from educationalists and public figures than the British Empire which is often condemned as having been racist and economically exploitative.

For example, despite his party's subsequently proclaimed change of attitude to the teaching of history, the Prime Minister, David Cameron, appeared to be sorry for Britain's imperial past when in July 2010 he expressed that he would visit India in a 'spirit of humility'.

Professor Niall Ferguson offers a less apologetic and more rational reassessment. He provides a list of things the British Empire (the biggest empire in the history of the world) passed on to its colonies:

When the British governed a country – even when they only influenced its government by

"the New Labour project's mission to ... destroy traditional British identity in order to promote multiculturalism was deliberate and politically motivated..."

flexing their military and financial muscles – there were certain distinctive features of their own society that they tended to disseminate. A list of the more important of these would run:

- The English language
- English forms of land tenure
- Scottish and English banking
- The Common Law
- Protestantism
- Team sports
- The limited or ‘night watchman’ state
- Representative assemblies
- The idea of liberty

The last of these is perhaps the most important because it remains the most distinctive feature of the Empire, the thing that sets it apart from its continental European rivals.⁴

Professor Thomas Sowell also emphasises freedom as Britain’s notable beneficial legacy:

Britain’s economic pioneering and imperial triumphs were by no means its only legacy to the world. Freedom, wherever it exists in the world today, owes much to developments in Britain. These include not only the historic evolution of a free society in the United Kingdom itself, providing political models and legal precedents for other free societies around the world, but also Britain’s key role in destroying the international slave trade in the nineteenth century, and its crucial role when the survival of freedom in the world was threatened in the early and dark days of World War II.⁵

The British Empire at its peak covered almost a quarter of the world’s land surface and governed a quarter of its population. It stretched all over the globe ensuring that the sun never set on the British Empire. It lasted for no less than 500 years, from the founding of the first English colony of Newfoundland in 1497 until the withdrawal from Hong Kong, one of the last of the British colonies, in 1997. (There are still over a dozen British Overseas Territories such as the Falklands, Bermuda and Gibraltar.)

The Empire’s longevity is often assumed to be down to the successful exploitation of the colonies. The charge that Britain made money out of the Empire is widely believed but actually false. Sowell explains:

Counting the costs of conquest and administration, for example, against the profits and taxes extracted from the colonies, together with other economic pluses and minuses, Britain as a whole did not benefit economically from the colonies.

Individual investors might make fortunes (Cecil Rhodes being the classic example) but the British taxpayers bore the heavy costs of maintaining the empire. Military defence was an especially heavy drain, leading to the world’s largest burden of military expenditures per capita on the British people.⁶

However, the British Empire did have ignoble beginnings marked by piracy and plunder sanctioned by the English crown. Gold and silver stolen from Spanish ships enriched the English state in the 16th and early 17th centuries. The fact that Spain obtained its loot by conquest and plunder in the first place hardly mitigates the crimes of Elizabeth I’s daring adventurers.

What followed were British conquests, colonisations and the cultivation of marketable produce like sugar, tobacco, tea and coffee for mass consumption. However, to discover the Empire’s true virtue, the idea of freedom, we need to go back in English history.

The Story of English Liberty

The idea of political liberty begins in England.

For freedom to flourish it needed to be protected by a system of law and that system in England and Wales was and still is English Common Law dating back to 1189, that is to the beginning of the reign of Richard I.

Prior to that, Henry II, who ascended the throne in 1154, made a number of legal reforms, such as establishing courts throughout the kingdom and introducing trial by jury to replace trial by ordeal. His systematic approach to legal institutions lay the ground work for the introduction of a common law.

English Common Law once established was, and continues to be, made by judges in courts on a case-by-case basis using common sense and legal precedent (*stare decisis*). It ensures that the rule of law applies to everyone in common regardless of his or her station in life, and that includes monarchs.

The system was so successful that it was exported to the colonies during the time of the British Empire and is still used in many Commonwealth countries today. The Americans continued to use the system after the revolution; Australian law still recognises the link to English law and Hong Kong still accepts the common law of England as their own. However, to get the full story we need to go back to a time before English Common Law was so-named.

First came the Charter of Liberties, a written proclamation issued in 1100, when Henry I ac-

“to discover the Empire’s true virtue, the idea of freedom, we need to go back in English history.”

ceded to the throne. Otherwise known as the Coronation Charter it attempted to prevent royal abuse of power by binding the king to certain laws and restrictions. This was a landmark document in English legal history.

Magna Carta

Another important milestone on the road to English freedom was *Magna Carta*, that Great Charter of Liberty, signed by King John under duress from a powerful group of barons, on 15th June 1215, at Runnymede. A shorter version re-issued in 1297 known as *The Great Charter of the Liberties of England and of the Liberties of the Forest* still remains on the statute books of England and Wales.

I am reminded of an episode of Hancock's Half Hour entitled 'Twelve Angry Men' (1959), in which the comedian Tony Hancock, addressed his co-jurors with these classic lines, "Does Magna Carta mean nothing to you? Did she die in vain?"⁷

Well she did not die – her influence not only thrived in the country of her birth but also pervaded the colonies of the British Empire and persists to this very day in the post imperial world.

The most significant clause of this charter is chapter 29 (or chapters 39 and 40 as it was in the original 1215 version) which states:

*No freeman is to be taken or imprisoned or disseised of his free tenement or his liberties or free customs or outlawed or exiled or in any way ruined, nor will we go against such a man or send against him save by lawful judgment of his peers or by the law of the land... To no one will we sell or deny or delay right of justice.*⁸

A plan by Gordon Brown's government to extend the provision to hold terror suspects for up to 42 days without charge, instead of the existing 28 days, was seen by some as an assault on our ancient rights as spelled out in *Magna Carta*. In October 2008 the plan was heavily defeated in the House of Lords by 309 votes to 118, reminding us that this ancient charter still has relevance today.

The detention of prisoners without charge in Guantanamo Bay by the US government during the Iraq war contravened the protection from arbitrary arrest embedded in *Magna Carta* and the constitution of the United States (the fifth amendment includes the 'due process of law' clause from *Magna Carta* rephrased) providing yet another modern example of why we need to reiterate constantly the statements expressed in this charter.⁹

The 17th century Leveller leader, John Lilburne, regarded English Common Law, and *Magna Carta* in particular, as the foundation of English rights and liberties. In his pamphlet entitled, *The Just Defence of John Lilburne, against such as charge him with turbulence of spirit*, published on 25th August 1653, just days after being acquitted by a jury at a trial in which he was charged with treason, he refers to the fundamental right stated in *Magna Carta*.¹⁰

This "first fundamental right" mentioned by Lilburne from *Magna Carta* corresponds with the Sixth Article of the Bill of Rights in the U.S. Constitution.¹¹

Coke's Reports and Institutes

An important individual in the history of English Common Law was Sir Edward Coke (pronounced Cook) who was appointed Solicitor General in 1592 and Attorney General in 1594 by Elizabeth I. He delved into the history of Common Law and collected ancient precedents. His major works were eventually published under the titles, *The Institutes of the Lawes of England and The Reports of Sir Edward Coke Kt. In English in Thirteen Parts Compleat*. His writings later known simply as his Reports and Institutes became the primary legal text used as the basis of legal education in England and America for the next hundred and fifty years. His work was hugely influential in the development of English Common Law.

Coke's ideas gave legitimacy to the concept of an 'ancient constitution' of England that allegedly had provided a legal tradition dating back to before the Norman Conquest, to a time beyond the memories of men, to time immemorial. This idea that an English man's rights and liberties were an inheritance from his ancestors dating back to antiquity was undoubtedly a powerful one.

In 1606, during the reign of James I, Coke became Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas. He was appointed Lord Chief Justice of England in 1613 and towards the end of his life he became one of the main authors of the *Petition of Right*, a significant legal document issued in 1628 during the reign of Charles I. Coke died in 1634 aged 82. His writings were, in later years, to become inspirational to both English Levellers and American revolutionaries alike.

The Petition of Right

The *Petition of Right* of 1628 was a document, presented by an aggrieved Parliament to Charles I, setting out the rights and liberties of the king's subjects and prohibiting the monarch from infringing them. It insisted on no taxation without the consent of Parliament. It reiterated the right to freedom from arbitrary arrest as stated in *Magna Carta*. It also forbade the enforced quartering of troops in people's homes and prohibited

"This idea that an English man's rights and liberties were an inheritance from his ancestors ... was undoubtedly a powerful one."

the imposition of martial law in peacetime. Charles, because of overwhelming parliamentary pressure, reluctantly agreed.

The Agreement of the People

In 1642, the struggle between King and Parliament descended into Civil War.

In October 1647, in the immediate aftermath of the First English Civil War, the first draft of an *Agreement of the People*, a proposed new constitution, was drawn up by the leaders of a politically active group of civilian Levellers in collaboration with the agitators of the New Model Army. This constitutional manifesto was discussed with the Army Grandees at the Putney Debates chaired by Oliver Cromwell. The agreement called for biennial parliaments and for the number of MPs representing an area to be in proportion to number of inhabitants. It also proposed the right to religious freedom, equality before the law and no conscription for war service. Major-General Ireton (Cromwell's brother-in-law) strongly objected to Colonel Rainsborough's proposal to extend the franchise to all adult males, wanting instead to restrict the vote to owners of property.

News of the escape of the King from custody ended these discussions and sparked the beginning of the Second English Civil War.

The King was defeated in the Second Civil War and an extended version of the *Agreement* was the subject of discussions between the Levellers, the Independents and the Army Council in the Whitehall Debates that took place in December 1648. John Lilburne and Richard Overton, the leading Levellers, walked out of the talks after disagreements with the Army Grandees. A revised *Agreement* was presented to the House of Commons on 20th January 1649 on the very day that the King's trial began but was never discussed. The King was executed on 30 January 1649.

A third and final version of the *Agreement* was published by the Leveller leaders in May 1649. It included additional demands such as the vote for all men aged 21 and over (except servants and beggars), no punishment for a person for refusing to answer questions against themselves in criminal cases, the death penalty to apply only to murder, the abolition of imprisonment for debt and the abolition of tithes. History records that this document was never adopted; nevertheless, the ideas of freedom expressed on its pages remained in men's minds for hundreds of years afterwards.

The Declaration of Right

When James II fled the country in 1688, William and Mary were jointly offered the throne of England, subject to the limitation of powers as set out

in the *Declaration of Right*. The effect of their agreement to this document was to establish a constitutional monarchy in England and this event is known to history as the Glorious Revolution. The *Declaration of Right* formed the template for the English *Bill of Rights* which was passed by Parliament in December 1689.

The Bill of Rights

The English *Bill of Rights* 1689 is an act of Parliament whose full title is *An Act Declaring the Rights and Liberties of the Subject and Settling the Succession of the Crown*.

The *Bill of Rights* spells out certain basic rights that apply to all Englishmen. These still apply not only in England but also in Commonwealth realms i.e. sovereign states within the Commonwealth, which were once British colonies.

It is this document that provided the inspiration for the United States *Bill of Rights*.

The Idea of Freedom

We can see from this catalogue of legal declarations of rights and liberties, and of restraints on regal power, that England's history has been a long struggle to obtain and maintain liberty for its people. Concepts such as the 'ancient constitution' and the 'free-born Englishman' over time became part of English consciousness and so it is easy to see how the idea of freedom became embedded in the English way of thinking and ready for export.

The Loss of America

Since the first permanent colony in America was established in Jamestown, Virginia in 1607 and the more successful settlement in New England of those Pilgrim families who had set sail from England for the New World in the Mayflower in 1620, migrants had been seeking either religious or economic freedom and usually found both in the colonies of British America.

However, the question has to be asked: if the British Empire was so free why did the Americans eventually want out? The truth is not all Americans did want out – opinion was divided – with many wanting to stay loyal to the crown. They proved this by fighting on the same side as the British Red Coats – giving rise to what amounted to a civil war. When the War of Independence was over around 100,000 people emigrated to Canada, England or the Caribbean in order to stay within British territory.

For those that were unhappy one of the key reasons was aptly expressed in a popular slogan of the day 'No taxation without representation.'

"Concepts such as the 'ancient constitution' and the 'free-born Englishman' over time became part of English consciousness..."

In this increasingly acrimonious atmosphere, the first Continental Congress was held at Carpenters' Hall in Philadelphia in the autumn of 1774, bringing together the more rebellious elements in the various colonial assemblies. Here, for the first time, resolutions were passed to withhold all taxes from the British government, if necessary by forcible resistance. Yet Samuel Adams's famous slogan 'No taxation without representation' was not a rejection of Britishness, but rather an emphatic *assertion* of Britishness. What the colonists said they were doing was demanding the same liberty enjoyed by their fellow subjects on the other side of the Atlantic. At this stage, they saw themselves as no more than transatlantic Britons who wanted real, local representation, not the 'virtual' representation they were being offered in the distant House of Commons. In other words, they wanted assemblies to be put on a par with the Westminster Parliament, in what would have been a reformed, quasi-federal Empire.¹²

The unwillingness of the British Parliament to countenance compromise led to a hardening of views in America with four out of five people now considering themselves to be American patriots who would be willing to fight for a republic.

On the 29th November 1775, Thomas Jefferson articulated their feelings:

*Believe me, dear Sir: there is not in the British empire a man who more cordially loves a union with Great Britain than I do. But, by the God that made me, I will cease to exist before I yield to a connection on such terms as the British Parliament propose; and in this, I think I speak the sentiments of America.*¹³

Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, which advocated republicanism, was a widely read and highly influential pamphlet at the time of the American Revolution. It was published in January 1776 after hostilities had begun, but no doubt helped recruit more rebels to the cause.

In July 1776, representatives from the thirteen American colonies came together in Philadelphia and at this meeting of the Continental Congress, the United States Declaration of Independence, which justified the revolution, was unanimously adopted. In the preamble written by Thomas Jefferson it famously declared:

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.*¹³

The English Philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) is considered to be one of the primary influences

on the Declaration, and it is this statement from his Second Treatise of Government that is most pertinent:

*The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges everyone: and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions.*¹⁴

The American War of Independence that had begun in 1775 did not finally end until 1804. It could be argued that the idea of liberty coming from England (and it is worth remembering here that John Locke and Thomas Paine were both English) was the catalyst that was responsible for starting the revolution. The British Empire had within it the seeds of its own destruction.

Abolition of Slavery

The British Empire is routinely condemned for its involvement in the transatlantic slave trade but had it avoided participation in this gruesome activity then another European country like Spain, Portugal, France or the Netherlands would almost certainly have filled the breach. What is more significant but less often commented upon is the British Empire's role in the abolition of slavery.

Thomas Sowell explains:

*Perhaps an even more remarkable contribution of Britain to the growth of freedom in the world was its leading role in the destruction of the international slave trade, and then of slavery itself. The magnitude of this achievement is hard to appreciate without first recognising that slavery was a worldwide institution, entrenched on every inhabited continent, subjugating people of every color, language, and religion, and going back thousands of years. Moreover, the effort to stamp out slave trading, and later the institution of slavery itself, encountered widespread resistance and evasions in many regions of the world, producing a bitter struggle that lasted for more than a century. The dogged persistence of the British in that struggle was a key factor in the ultimate destruction of slavery around the world.*¹⁵

The other point worth making is that the abolition of slavery came at considerable cost to Britain and this is rarely acknowledged. Sowell puts it in perspective:

Banning slavery throughout the British Empire was more than simply a matter of enacting laws. Since slaves were legally

“ What is more significant but less often commented upon is the British Empire's role in the abolition of slavery.”

property, their owners had to be compensated for their emancipation, and that cost the British government £20 million – a huge sum in the nineteenth century, when the pound sterling was of far greater value than today.¹⁶

The British Empire is rightly criticised for having engaged in slavery but when we look at freedom in historical terms, and slavery is of course the opposite of freedom, it is true that this barbaric practice, common amongst human civilisations for thousands of years, was brought to an end by the British Empire. This was a hugely important achievement by the British Empire with reference to the history of the liberty of mankind.

India – The Jewel in the Crown

The cost to the mother country of maintaining its colonies was more than the financial benefits it received. This has been the opinion of many as Ferguson identified:

...the liberals, from Adam Smith onwards, who have maintained for almost as many years that the British Empire was, even from Britain's point of view, 'a waste of money'.¹⁷

This was certainly true in the case of India but the question is did the local population benefit from being part of the British Empire? Roderick Moore thinks it did.

As an example of the consequences of British rule, take India, where two-thirds of the population of the British Empire lived. Today it is the biggest democracy in the world, but its democratic institutions were all created by Britain. The Mogul emperors and local princes who ruled the country before the British conquest were all despots who did not know the first thing about democracy, constitutional government or the rule of law. A few of them were benevolent despots, like Emperor Akbar, but most of them would cut off your head if they did not like your face. Shortly after the East India Company founded its first trading post, at Surat, the local Mogul governor invited some British officials to a party, and they were shocked to discover that when he was not satisfied with the dancing girls' performance, he had them executed on the spot. Under British rule, no one could be sentenced to death or any other punishment without a fair trial. Barbaric customs such as suttee, infanticide and child marriage were banned, and the Thugs and other cults which practiced human sacrifice were suppressed. To this day, Indian law is still based on the uniform

penal code which was written in the 1830s by a commission under the chairmanship of Lord Macaulay.¹⁸

The British Empire's opposition to widows being burnt to death on their husbands' funeral pyres and its suppression of the murderous Thugee tradition responsible for the death by strangulation of 10,000 wayfarers every year, clearly had beneficial effects for the indigenous population of India. The rule of law, established by the British, allowed people in India to live freer lives than they had been able to before – it is in this respect that the British Empire had a positive effect on the liberty of the inhabitants of the Indian sub-continent.

Australia – A Giant Prison

When Captain James Cook first discovered Australia in 1770, he landed at Botany Bay and hoisted the Union Flag, naming the land New South Wales and claiming it for Britain. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Australia became a penal colony for the British Empire where thousands of criminals were transported. Petty criminals were sentenced to eight years and those responsible for more serious crimes (and who in some cases had received commuted capital sentences) got 14 years. Those who served their time were freed and the majority stayed in Australia to start a new life. They were free to work and save and buy land, and many prospered. This gave hope to others serving their time. This giant prison called Australia offered what was probably the best criminal rehabilitation programme in the history of the world. Ironically, what started out as a prison for the British Empire was a place that offered a new life and freedom to thousands of people.

Aborigines in Australia did not fare so well under the British Empire. Those in Tasmania were wiped out by a combination of introduced disease (against which they had no immunity) and the mass killings of the Black War, the latter of which Ferguson refers to:

In one of the most shocking of all the chapters in the history of the British Empire, the Aborigines in Van Dieman's Land were hunted down, confined, and ultimately exterminated: an event which truly merits the now overused term 'genocide'. (Trucanini, the last of them, died in 1876.) All that can be said in mitigation is that, had Australia been an independent republic in the nineteenth century, like the United States, the genocide might have been on a continental scale, rather than just a Tasmanian phenomenon.¹⁹

Nevertheless, this was ethnic cleansing of the

"The rule of law, established by the British, allowed people in India to live freer lives than they had been able to before..."

worst kind and leaves a stain on the history of the Empire.

The Scramble for Africa

Before the scramble for Africa between the rival European empires had begun, the Dark Continent consisted of some 10,000 independent African kingdoms. It is a surprising fact that in parts of Africa the wheel had not been invented by the end of the 19th century and it cannot be disputed that Africans benefited greatly in their general conditions of life due to contact with the West as a result of colonisation.

The British were the most successful of the empire builders, colonising half of the continent by 1900. This was not achieved without wars. There were the Matabele Wars, the Zulu Wars and the Boer Wars. There were strategic, economic and political reasons for these wars but moral justifications for them were at best dubious.

Historians have disagreed on the rights and wrongs of Britain's involvement in the Boer War. Andrew Roberts gives his view:

Although the Boer War has long been denounced by historians as the British Empire's Vietnam, and characterised as being fought for gold and diamonds, and trumped up by greedy, jingoistic British politicians keen to bully the two small, brave South African republics, the truth was very different. Far from fighting for their own freedom, the Boers were really struggling for the right to oppress others, principally their black servant-slaves, but also the large non-Afrikaans white Uitlander (foreigner) population of the Transvaal who worked the mines, paid 80% of the taxes and yet had no vote. The American colonists had fought under James Otis' cry that 'Taxation without representation is tyranny' in 1776, yet when Britain tried to apply that same rule to Britons in South Africa, she was accused of vicious interference.²⁰

At the time, the Liberal MP David Lloyd George expressed his view in the House of Commons:

A war of annexation... against a proud people must be a war of extermination, and that is unfortunately what it seems we are now committing ourselves to – burning homesteads and turning women and children out of their homes... the savagery which must necessarily follow will stain the name of this country.²¹

Whether or not any of Britain's European rivals would have acted more humanely in Africa, had Britain not strived for imperial expansion in that

continent, is a moot point.

World War II

The 20th century saw the emergence of two new imperial powers far more terrifying than the British Empire. The Rape of Nanking in 1937, when 300,000 Chinese civilians were murdered and 80,000 women were raped, and the extermination of more than 1 million inmates – mostly but not exclusively Jews – in Auschwitz in Poland between 1941 and 1944, are just *examples* of atrocities that demonstrate the brutality of the Japanese and German Empires respectively, and these are the empires against which Britain and its colonies, along with its American Allies, fought during World War II. Although virtually bankrupted in the process, the British Empire played a major part in pushing back the advance and domination of Europe and the Far East by these evil empires. The financial bailout of Britain by the USA after the war, and the resulting national debt that was incurred, marked the beginning of the end of the British Empire.

The Decline of Empire

After the war, the idea of freedom, originally exported from England, was now the catalyst for the break-up of Empire. The British colonies were demanding their independence and the mother country, to its credit, was able to manage the transition from empire to Commonwealth in a predominantly bloodless and civilised manner. The disengagement of Britain from its colonies was conducted by mutually agreed arrangements. The bloodshed in the Indian sub-continent after the partitioning of East and West Pakistan from India in 1947, was a result of Hindus and Muslims slaughtering each other: the British were no longer in the business of waging wars against those who sought independence.

Conclusion

The British Empire was not without blemish: the transatlantic slave trade and Tasmanian genocide have already been noted. Ferguson acknowledges the downsides by mentioning further examples:

When Imperial authority was challenged – in India in 1857, in Jamaica in 1831 or 1865, in South Africa in 1899 – the British response was brutal. When famine struck (in Ireland in the 1840s, in India in the 1870s) their response was negligent, in some measure positively culpable.²²

The only saving grace in the story of the concentrations camps, invented by the British and used at the time of the Boer War, was that an English woman, Emily Hobhouse, made revelations to the British public about the disgusting conditions that

“Although virtually bankrupted in the process, the British Empire played a major part in pushing back the advance and domination of Europe and the Far East by these evil empires.”

prevailed there, forcing the government to insist on drastic changes for their improvement.

There is a modern tendency to focus on the negative aspects of the British Empire without looking at the overall picture. The fact that parliamentary democracies and relatively free markets are more commonplace around the world as a direct result of the British Empire, facilitating more freedom for more people in more places, is significant but all too often overlooked. An empire that lasted 500 years and at its peak encompassed 458 million people was unlikely to be flawless. Despite all the negatives, I think on balance the British Empire was a good thing in the respect that it spread the idea of freedom around the world to such an extent that the world today is freer than it would have been had any other empire you care to mention prevailed instead.

I should point out that as a libertarian I do not advocate colonialism. However; looking back over the history of empires, I think the British version *was more conducive to individual freedom than others*. I think it is worth emphasising this point because it is fortuitous for mankind, that in an era of competing empires, the British Empire predominated for long enough to allow the idea of liberty to take root in many parts of the world.

What was it about the Anglo-Saxon political culture that enabled it to be so successfully exported and so eagerly defended? This was best summed up by Winston Churchill in his 1943 Harvard speech:

*Law, language, literature – these are considerable factors. Common conceptions of what is right and decent, a marked regard for fair play, especially to the weak and poor, a stern sentiment of impartial justice, and above all a love of personal freedom ... these are the common conceptions on both sides of the ocean among the English-speaking peoples.*²³

The last of these, a love of personal freedom, is one legacy of the British Empire that is certainly worth celebrating.

Notes

- (1) Michael Gove, text of speech given to the Conservative Party conference in Birmingham, 5th October 2010, retrieved 8th May 2011, <http://tinyurl.com/3zp2od5>.
- (2) Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain made the Modern World*, London, Allen Lane (The Penguin Press), 2003, p. 60.
- (3) Text of “What have the Romans ever done for us” scene from Monty Python’s *Life of Brian*, 1979, retrieved 8th May 2011, <http://www.epicure.demon.co.uk/whatheromans.html>.
- (4) Ferguson, *op. cit.*, p. xxii.

(5) Thomas Sowell, *Conquests and Cultures: An International History*, New York, Basic Books, 1998, p. 87.

(6) *Ibid.*, p. 85.

(7) Excerpt from “Twelve Angry Men” episode of the BBC TV series *Hancock’s Half Hour*, 1959, retrieved 8th May 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JNZosqjIJSs>.

(8) Sir Anthony Clarke, ‘Did Magna Carta die in vain?’, *The Times*, 2nd October 2008, retrieved 8th May 2011, <http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/law/article4860276.ece>.

(9) Amendment V of the *Bill of Rights* in the US Constitution reads as follows:

No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the Militia, when in actual service in time of War or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offence to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty and property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.

Referenced at ‘United States Constitution’ page, Cornell University Law School, retrieved 8th May 2011, <http://topics.law.cornell.edu/constitution/billofrights>.

(10) John Lilburne, *The Just defence of John Lilburne*, 25th August 1653, retrieved 8th May 2011, www.strecorsoc.org/docs/defence1.html:

As for instance, the first fundamental right I contended for in the late King’s and Bishops’ times, was for the freedom of men’s persons, against arbitrary and illegal imprisonment, it being a thing expressly contrary to the law of the land, which requires, That no man be attached, imprisoned etc (as in Magna Carta, cap 29) but by lawful judgement of a Jury, a law so just and preservative, as without which entirely observed, every man’s person is continually liable to be imprisoned at pleasure, and either to be kept there for months or years, or to be starved there, at the wills of those that in any time are in power, as since seen more, had not some men strove against it; but it being my lot to be imprisoned in those times, I conceive I did my duty to manifest the injustice thereof, and claim and cry out for my right, and in doing so was serviceable to the liberties of my country, and no ways deserved to be accounted turbulent in doing so.

(11) Amendment VI of the *Bill of Rights* in the US Constitution reads as follows:

In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and pub-

“... parliamentary democracies and relatively free markets are more commonplace around the world as a direct result of the British Empire...”

lic trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed, which district shall have previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor, and to have the Assistance of Counsel for his defence.

Cornell University Law School, *op. cit.*

(12) Ferguson, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

(13) 'United States Declaration of Independence' of 1776, *Wikipedia*, 12th April 2011, retrieved 8th May 2011, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Declaration_of_Independence.

(14) John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, London, Everyman, 1689/1993, p. 117.

(15) Sowell, *op. cit.*, p.91.

(16) *Ibid.*, p. 92.

(17) Ferguson, *op. cit.*, p. xviii.

(18) Roderick Moore, *Two World Wars and an Empire: A Reappraisal of British History*, Historical Notes No. 39, London, Libertarian Alliance, 2000, pp. 1-2.

(19) Ferguson, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-111.

(20) Andrew Roberts, *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples since 1900*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2006, p. 27.

(21) Ferguson, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

(22) *Ibid.*, p. xxi.

(23) Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 641.

About the author

Peter Richards is a Hampshire-based entrepreneur and writer. Besides being a contributor to the SIF, he is a life member of the Rationalist Association and a supporter of the Libertarian Alliance, the Freedom Association and the British Weights & Measures Association. He has also contributed to *The Freethinker* and *Right Now!*

In May this year, the Book Guild Ltd published his book, *Free-born John Lilburne: English Libertarian: And Other Essays on Liberty* (192pp, ISBN 978-1846245640). This consists of a number of essays from a libertarian perspective, many of which were first published either by the Society for Individual Freedom in the pages of *The Individual* and/or by the Libertarian Alliance as pamphlets.

Big business and the free market

For some time I have come to the conclusion that the grave deficiency in the current output and thinking of our libertarians and "classical liberals" is an enormous blind spot when it comes to big business. There is a tendency to worship Big Business per se ... and a corollary tendency to fail to realize that while big business would indeed merit praise if they won that bigness on the purely free market, that in the contemporary world of total neo-mercantilism and what is essentially a neo-fascist "corporate state," bigness is *a priori* highly suspect, because Big Business most likely got that way through an intricate and decisive network of subsidies, privileges, and direct and indirect grants of monopoly protection.

Murray Rothbard, writing in a private letter in 1966



The logo for the Libertarian Alliance features a stylized, bold letter 'A' on the left. To the right of the 'A', the words 'Libertarian' and 'Alliance' are stacked vertically in a bold, sans-serif font.

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THE BEST WITHIN US

Dr Robert Lefever

“My life does not belong to them: it belongs to me.”

In the next twenty years I want to produce my best work ever. I want to do the background reading and training so that I am properly prepared. I want to plan and discuss and then try things out and make some mistakes and learn from them. I want – close to me – people who are adventurers like me. I want to live each and every day as if it is my last. I want to make a difference.

The beautiful thing about all of this is that nothing can stop me. I have no ambition to own anything and therefore I cannot get myself into trouble with banks. I have no wish to employ vast numbers of staff – or even any – and therefore I cannot have problems with prima donnas or petty personalities. I have no wish to do anything that requires adherence to government regulations, policies and procedures and inspection by authoritarian bureaucrats.

In short, I have no wish to be a master or a slave to anyone else. I shall work entirely for my own

pleasure, choosing for myself where I contribute to others. I shall live entirely for myself, doing only what makes me happy and fulfilled, which can only be achieved – by anybody – through bringing happiness and fulfilment to the lives of others. To this end, I shall be utterly selfish and individualistic – doing what I myself believe in and rejecting the demands or pleas of other people that I shall work or live for their Grand Design. My life does not belong to them: it belongs to me.

About the author

Dr Robert Lefever specialises in the treatment of depressive illness and any form of addictive or compulsive behaviour. He can be contacted at 96 Harley Street, London, W1G 7HY or 07540 281820 or Info@DrRobertLefever.co.uk. Further information can be found at www.doctor-robert.com.

The Trap of Multiculturalism

Unless there is a federating national or supranational narrative that brings all the diverse components of a country together and gives them a common impulse, the country becomes an agglomeration of ... tribes unified by their mutual dissensions and relying on the state only as a simple mediating authority. Then identity ceases to coincide with citizenship; it is in fact what makes citizenship impossible...

It is not enough to regularize the status of thousands of immigrants, to provide them with a life and suitable work. In addition, if they want to stay in Europe, we must make them Europeans – Spaniards, French, Italians – and this presupposes a political society sure of itself and of its values... We blame great nations, often rightly, for their failures to absorb immigrants. But we forget that there is also a despotism on the part of the minorities, who resist assimilation if it is not accompanied by extraterritorial status...

Still more serious is the fact that under cover of respecting cultural or religious differences (the basic credo of multiculturalism), individuals are locked into an ethnic or racial definition, cast back into the trap from which we were trying to free them... As during the colonial era, they are put under house arrest in their skins, in their origins. By a perverse dialectic ... we can no longer see others as equals ... but we must see them as inferiors, victims of perpetual oppression whose past ordeals interest us more than their present merits...

All the ambiguity of multiculturalism proceeds from the fact that with the best intentions, it imprisons men, women, and children in a way of life and in traditions from which they often aspire to free themselves. The politics of identity in fact reaffirm difference at the very moment when we are trying to establish equality...

Multiculturalism may ultimately be nothing more than ... a legal apartheid in which we find the wealthy once again explaining tenderly to the poor that money won't make them happy: let us shoulder the burden of freedom, of inventing ourselves, of the equality of men and women; you have the joys of custom, forced marriages, the veil, polygamy, and clitoridectomy.

Extracted by the editor of *The Individual* from Chapter 6, 'Listen to My Suffering', *The Tyranny of Guilt*, Pascal Bruckner, Princeton University Press, Woodstock, Oxfordshire, 2006/2010, pp. 143-151.

“POLITICAL CORRECTNESS”: BENIGN AND MALIGN

Dr Nigel Gervas Meek

Political correctness: Benign

I suspect that most readers of this journal will display an aversion to “political correctness”. I would urge caution. Political correctness is both more benign and more malign than one might imagine.

To deal briefly with the former. It can just be another way of meaning courtesy or politeness. I can well recall that it used not to be unknown to encounter – even amongst educated and supposedly decent people in this country – terms such as “nigger”, “paki”, “poof”, “mong”...

At best, these words indicate passive and anonymous contempt. At worst, they are terms of active abuse, understood as such by both speaker and listener. In any case, I would hope that such things are no longer in the everyday vocabulary of civilised people.

Political correctness: Malign

But there is another version that is far worse. On the 12th September 2010 the *Daily Mail* (<http://tinyurl.com/35patj6>) carried an article, ‘Taxpayers fund council ‘adventures in Sindia and Lesbian-andgayland?’ (*sic*) as part of sessions on equality and diversity’.

The article claims that,

More than 30 managers from Brighton and Hove City Council have been on the two-day ‘Leading on Diversity’ course in the past year – at a cost of several thousand pounds. In the session entitled ‘Adventures in Sindia, the English Exodus, staff are asked to imagine that it is 2030 and the ‘world is a very different place’. In this scenario, much of the South-East of England and East Anglia is under water. Millions of English families desperate for work have been forced to uproot to Sindia, an economic federation which is made up of China and India. All the participants are asked to imagine that they are a seven-year-old child called Sarah Hardy, whose family has just moved to Delhi. They are also warned that the English are largely despised in India because they have a reputation for ‘illegality, criminality, cultural conservatism and an inability to learn the host language’.

The article continues,

The course material states: ‘Your seventh birthday was a miserable occasion. Your parents invited all the children in your class to a party. All but one failed to turn up and none sent an RSVP. The only child who came was a Jewish girl from Hungary. Somehow you felt that she understood what you were going through, even though you never talked about it.’ The course attendees are told that while in Sindia they can expect to hear comments such as: ‘Why do you insist on eating that bland food? What you need is a good masala’, ‘Do your parents really force you to drink alcohol at the age of ten?’, and ‘What do you call an English virgin? A contradiction in terms’.

Moreover,

In the other session, staff are asked to imagine that ‘while asleep one night they have slipped through a wormhole in space’ and woken up in a parallel world where it is normal to be lesbian or gay. They are told that they are now in a country where ‘heterosexual teachers are very reluctant to come out’, ‘the ideal family consists of a lesbian or gay male couple’, and ‘that conceiving a child by heterosexual intercourse is viewed with distaste’. They are then asked to consider how they would respond if people asked them: ‘What do you actually do in bed?’, ‘Don’t you think heterosexuality may be a phase you are going through?’, and ‘Is it possible that what you need is a good gay lover?’

As for who is running all of this, we are told that,

The course for staff at Brighton and Hove Council was organised and run by Aziz Associates, a training consultancy founded in 1996. The company is run by Razia Aziz, 45, a politics graduate, and clients include health trusts, local councils and Government departments. Its website describes Ms Aziz as a ‘coach, facilitator, and performance and workshop artist’ with a ‘holistic style that embraces the intellect, body and heart’.

The online version of the article carries the usual

“It can just be another way of meaning courtesy or politeness.”

responses that one would expect from readers of the *Daily Mail*, with the inevitable suggestions of “madness” on the part of the organisers.

Not Madness, Just Evil

However, commenting on this newspaper article on the Libertarian Alliance Forum on the 12th September 2010, my friend Dr Sean Gabb, the Director of the Libertarian Alliance, suggested a much more sinister interpretation. I make no apologies for quoting him at some length.

This is not a waste of the taxpayers' money. From the point of view of those spending it, the money is very well spent. The function of this project is not so much to stop people from disliking homosexuals and foreigners, as to make them feel ridiculous. They are forced thereby to acknowledge in public and to themselves who is boss, and that to resist the boss in anything is fatal. Also, once they have been bullied into such nonsense, they only way that many people will be able to retain any feeling of self-respect is to persuade themselves that it was all in a good cause.

Do you remember how Caligula appointed his horse as one of the Consuls for the year? Was this because he was mad, and he somehow thought the appointment would please his horse? Or was the act a deliberate humiliation of a still powerful and highly conservative aristocracy, the members of which now had to make public fools of themselves as they went about the business of consulting the horse on policy and fitting it into the traditional ceremonies?

There are similar stories about the victims of the French and Russian Revolutions. Indeed, I recall a case from many years ago, where some lower class thugs caught two middle aged, middle class woman and murdered them. Before murdering them, they made their victims perform “erotic dances”. Again, this probably wasn't because the thugs found simple pleasure in watching middle aged, middle class woman engage in lesbian sex. It was to humiliate the women and to break them into to whatever else was expected of them before they were murdered.

Going back to the present case, people who have abased themselves in the ways required before the altar of political correctness will be less inclined to protest at or to sabotage the tyrannical whims of their masters. Many, indeed, can be expected to join in with apparent pleasure. Some, no doubt, will file the humiliation away for some future time when the tables will have been turned. But most will go along with it...

“people who have abased themselves in the ways required before the altar of political correctness will be less inclined to protest ... the tyrannical whims of their masters.”

At the start of his article on the British Empire in this issue of *The Individual*, Peter Richards describes multiculturalism as a deliberate and politically motivated device designed to destroy British – and I might add Western – identity. Political correctness in its malign form is another such device, used to crush the identity and spirit of the individual.

About the author

Dr Nigel G. Meek is the editor and/or membership secretary of the SIF, the Libertarian Alliance and the Campaign Against Censorship



(Continued from page 1)

published by the LA in 2003 – which was essentially a critique of his book, *Unnecessary Suffering*. Lord Glasman, whom I've known personally for a decade or more, and moreover being of generous spirit, accepted this in good part. His only complaint – as he remarked when we last met at the end of 2010 – was that an Internet search for him always located this article in its SIF or LA variants at the top of the results list. With his new-found renown, this is no longer true! Although we have our differences – although they may not be as

great as one might think – I wish this honest and thoughtful man well.

If I might be allowed to end with another personal comment... Despite an unspeakably dreadful few years that would have crushed a lesser man, it's good to see my friend and former GP Dr Robert Lefever still hard at work. His short piece in this issue has a prayer-like quality that perhaps gives the measure of the man.

Dr Nigel G. Meek

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The SIF's Aim:

“To promote responsible individual freedom”

Founded in the 1940s, the SIF is a classical liberal organisation that believes in the economic and personal freedom of the individual, subject only to the equal freedom of others.

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- ✓ The freedom, importance and personal responsibility of the individual.
- ✓ The sovereignty of Parliament and its effective control over the Executive.
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SIF Activities

The SIF organises public meetings featuring speakers of note, holds occasional luncheons at the Houses of Parliament, publishes this journal to which contributions are welcome, and has its own website. The SIF also has two associated campaigns: Tell-IT, that seeks to make information on outcomes of drugs and medical treatments more widely known and available to doctors and patients alike, and Choice in Personal Safety (CIPS), that opposes seatbelt compulsion and similar measures.

Joining the SIF

If you broadly share our objectives and wish to support our work, then please write to us at the address on this page, enclosing a cheque for £15 (minimum) made payable to ‘Society for Individual Freedom’.

The Law of Equal Freedom

*“Every man has freedom to do all that he wills,
provided he infringes not the equal freedom of any other man.”*

Herbert Spencer, *Social Statics*, 1851