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KEEP ON PREACHING TO THE CONVERTED!

“Preaching to the converted” is usually a criticism. It suggests laziness and “taking a warm bath in your own prejudices”. True enough. That’s why the SIF and allied organisations spend a great deal of time on “outreach”. For example, 60% of all hard-copies of *The Individual* are sent to potentially relevant—and perhaps even potentially interested!—non-members such as academics, politicians, journalists and think-tankers. Large numbers of copies are also downloaded from our website each year as free PDFs, the vast majority of which will be read by non-members.

However, three days in just one week in October 2007 reiterated the importance of “preaching to the converted”. On the 23rd October the SIF held its luncheon at the House of Lords. The guest speaker was Celia Hampton and her speech is carried in this issue. On the 27th and 28th October the Libertarian Alliance held its annual conference, banquet and awards ceremony. Many of those who spoke or attended will be familiar to readers of *The Individual* and a few photos, courtesy of David Farrer, are featured in this issue.

Both of these occasions were wonderful in

their function “as advertised”: to listen to interesting and sometimes provocative presentations on a variety of themes. But for many of us, just as important was enjoying the company of others who broadly speaking are indeed “us”. (And the food and drink on both occasions were also most enjoyable!)

We live in a world where we are bombarded by statist, collectivist, interventionist, authoritarian—feel free to insert your own favourite term—propaganda from every conceivable direction. For a few days a year, what a joy it is to rediscover that *I am not alone!*

In his Chairman’s report to the 2007 AGM, Mike Plumbe noted that “so much information and discussion can be handled on the Internet that, apart from the personal contact, not a lot is gained from meetings which cannot be obtained more easily by other means.”

This is true except that I would not relegate personal contact to a mere “apart from”. *It is absolutely vital.*

Nigel Meek

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Edited by Nigel Meek and published by the Society for Individual Freedom. Contact details can be found on the back page.

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ON BEING A GREEN LIBERTARIAN

Damien Mullan

What I Am

I am a green libertarian. It's a simple statement, but one that can cause no end of smirking and allegations of political naiveté and dillittantism when stated in the presence of the politically active. What I mean when I say this is: I am a political and economic libertarian who has been convinced by the science informing the green movement. And that's it. What I mean to say is that, as I and many others see it, the two positions are by no means mutually exclusive.

The Compatibility of Green and Libertarian Thinking

Libertarianism is ordinarily regarded as an extremely flexible political philosophy and, of course, it is. However environmentalism has the stigma of long being associated both with Draconian government legislation and new age irrationalism, leaving many in our camp to regard the whole concept as dubious. It's true that attempts to smear and suppress the few remaining geologists and climatologists repudiating global warming smack of a witch hunt, and that there may be grounds for doubting the man-made nature of the causes of climate change. But climate change is only one issue, albeit a crucial one, and focusing on it exclusively is a 'liberal' trick of the light, designed to drum up partisan panic.

One linchpin of a possible libertarian attitude to the environment is the removal of sovereign immunity. The sudden accountability of the government would allow a whole raft of environmentally damaging programs and initiatives to be legally challenged. For example, think wetlands management and water allocation in California or, closer to home, the looming uptake of a vast nuclear power program (although ironically, fission power is now close to being reluctantly supported by environmentalists as a way to curb CO₂ emissions) and the under-use of Britain's tidal energy potential. Also, perhaps surprisingly, if you examine many of the goals and actions of the early green movement you see a clear commitment to grassroots action and decentralization tied in with a clear belief in personal re-

sponsibility. These are aims and objectives that would not look out of place championed under a libertarian banner.

As enthusiastic as I am about sustainable development working hand in hand with the free market and the green movement's continuing conversion into something more rational and workable, I am also realistic. There is great difficulty for many green libertarians to separate the necessity of some form of compulsion from a workable means of achieving their aim of ecological preservation. This, by default, leads many holding these views to adopt min-archisim—a belief in a continuing minimal state—and grant that one of the state's few remaining obligations would be the enforcement of some fairly stringent environmental regulations.

The justifications for this are complicated. Take the attitude to pollution. Briefly, it can be argued that pollution of the atmosphere or water table—and damage to the biosphere in general—can be considered to be the initiation of force, and that the resulting hazards cause the injured party to spend his or her own financial resources on healthcare. This is considered to constitute theft. As an example it is logical, but doubtless very difficult to argue as a general case, given the apparent malleability of scientific interpretation surrounding the concept of pollution.

In any case, it seems clear that many of the seemingly intractable differences result from the lingering prejudices that both positions harbour and which have been inherited from the political company that they are both used to keeping. As geo-libertarian essayist Dan Sullivan¹) puts it in his own writing on the subject:

"In general, Libertarians are overly hostile to government and cling to the fiction that virtually all private fortunes are legitimately earned. Most Greens are overly hostile to free enterprise and cling to the fiction that harmony and balance can be achieved through increased government interven-

"many of the ... differences result from the lingering prejudices that both positions harbour and which have been inherited from the political company that they are both used to keeping ."

tion... *There is nothing mutually exclusive between the... key values of the Greens and the principles of the Libertarians. By reconciling these values and principles, we can bring together people whose allegiance to truth is stronger than their biases. This could be of great value to both parties, partly because any new party that wants to break into a two-party system has to appeal to a broad spectrum of voters.*

But even more importantly, each party needs attributes the other has to offer. Libertarians need the intuitive awareness of the Greens to keep them from losing touch with people's real values, and Greens need the analytical prowess of the Libertarians to keep them from indulging in emotional self-deception. Libertarians can teach Greens about the spirit of enterprise and the wonders of economic freedom, and Greens can teach Libertarians about the spirit of compassion and the wonders of community cohesion."

Implications for Electoral Politics

Though this is all couched from an American standpoint and there may be more difficulties with this concept in a UK context, there are still some valid points made. Perhaps we are too reluctant to engage with the existing political institutions. Witness the protracted debate

over forming a political party, despite the benefits that this might bring in galvanising the large numbers of people in this country who consider themselves to be libertarian but who are discouraged by the lack of any national organisation that they see as electorally relevant; or the seeming impossibility of prying the Conservative party away from its tooth and nail struggle with Labour to appear the more centrist, the ferocity of which causes their positions to blur. A party which could be composed of both greens and libertarians, or even a general atmosphere in which the two political philosophies are more cordial to one another, could be mutually beneficial. It may also help to ease the public perception of extremism which afflicts both causes.

We are not the same. We will probably never be the same. But this does not mean that we cannot find common ground and work in concert to achieve shared objectives. The possibilities that exist in the space between our two separate movements could just possibly be, in some form that no one has anticipated, the genesis of the next big thing in global politics, and I think that that is worth exploring.

Note

(1) Dan Sullivan 'Greens and Libertarians: The yin and yang of our political future', originally published in 1992, retrieved 8th October 2007, <http://geolib.com/essays/sullivan.dan/greenlibertarians.html>.



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"A party which could be composed of both greens and libertarians ... could be mutually beneficial."



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LOST IN THE FOG: HOW FREEDOM IS BEING ERODED BY LAW AND WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT

Celia Hampton

Introduction

The last few years have seen a tidal wave of reforming legislation designed to change the way we live. Did we ask for this? Indirectly, I suppose we did, but we could not have foreseen the reality. We certainly did not expect the government to take new powers to itself at the expense of our fundamental freedoms. Vaguely conceived aspects of the public good have been given priority over liberty. The measures slipped through unnoticed, or objections were dismissed with a wave of the ministerial hand.

Much of the legislation has been justified as “modernisation”. This word should ring the alarm. Essentially it means that a freedom we have enjoyed since the Middle Ages is now to be treated as old-fashioned and dispensable.

A clear reaffirmation of our fundamental freedoms is urgently needed, preferably in a bill of rights that takes priority over regular legislation. Our freedoms define the limit of government power. Parliament no longer stands up for us. The civil service used to caution over-eager politicians on the legitimacy of government action, but no longer, it seems.

We must stand up for our freedom, although I am not quite sure who “we” are. The political elite calls us “ordinary people”—barely suppressing the sneer. No political party is likely to embrace a plan that is designed to curb its power. The media may spread the message, but the most vocal part of it supports legislative creep—indeed, it often asks for more. The idea that simply passing a law solves a problem has taken hold.

It should not be forgotten that a future government may take a much less benign view than the present one. The groundwork for a new demagogue has been laid. Technology is making possible what 20th century dictators could only dream of.

A Bill of Rights

This idea is self-contained and quite limited. It should include only the freedoms articulated by the common law and restated in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Legally, it is neat and economical. My individual freedom is limited by the fact that every other person has the same freedom. I cannot kill my neighbour because he too has the freedom to live.

Since my duty is simply to respect others’ freedoms, there is no need to mention it. The government’s announcement of a “bill of rights and responsibilities” on 25th October 2007 suggests that it may create duties to balance, and possibly countermand, the rights. That is wholly redundant and should be resisted. It could entrench the power of the state to dilute our freedoms.

Regular laws are needed to spell out just what the individual may or may not do so that his or her behaviour does not impair another person’s freedom. This grows more complicated as human relations grow more complex, but this is no excuse to cut back on everyone’s freedom.

Government in the narrow sense—the party that we elected—also uses law to do much more by way of administration, defence, public services and so on. The context for all this law is the spending of tax revenue. That is a matter for the ballot box, not a bill of rights.

The common law freedoms are easy to grasp. They underlie our notions of what is “fair”. I prefer to call them “freedoms” rather than “rights” as a right suggests a claim to something positive. A freedom is rather an effective right to protest against something done to us.

The big freedoms are the right to life, freedom from physical interference, and the rule of law. The biggest is the rule of law because that secures the others. It means we are all equal before the law in our “state of nature”—as human

“A freedom is ... an effective right to protest against something done to us.”

animals with minds. In particular, no one can be made to suffer for something that was not illegal when he did it, no punishment may be imposed unless the due process of law has been followed, and no one has impunity from punishment if he does do something contrary to law.

Life, freedom from torture and the rule of law are supreme. Other freedoms—personal liberty, speech, thought, association, marriage, family life, privacy, property—are also presumed in our favour, but they are subject to balancing. It is harder to identify the point at which one person's freedom impinges on another's. No one is free to torture another person, but my freedom to own a car can be tightly controlled because it is also a lethal weapon.

The possibility of mistake is one practical test that may be applied to any new law that has coercive or penal effects. What impact would it have on a blameless individual mistaken for someone in the target category? Will it be a passing inconvenience that can be put down to bad luck? Can it be compensated by a sum of money? Or will it ruin the person affected? Each item will have its own tipping point where the outcome for the innocent individual outweighs any general welfare goal served by the legislation.

Two Examples

Some of the laws passed in recent years should have been out of bounds all along. Holding someone in custody without telling them why is unconscionable. It goes against habeas corpus as well as article 5 of the Convention. To do so for four weeks is no better than for three months. The power under the *Terrorism Act* should not extend beyond a few days.

The Anti-Social Behaviour Order or ASBO is another example. No justification in utilitarian terms can get over the fact that this law is shoddy and illegal under common law principles and article 7 of the Convention. It violates the basic tenet of the rule of law that you cannot be punished for doing something that was not a crime when you did it.

The ASBO customises the criminal law to fit the individual. This is unscrupulous. The legal prohibition of such laws was given shape in the 17th century after the demise of the Court of Star Chamber. That used to invent the crime to fit whatever the accused had

done.

The same thing is done by the ASBO at low level. A policeman or local authority official can specify almost anything—where you go, whom you meet, how much noise you make... Whatever it is will become a crime from that moment onwards, just for you - not for the general public. Disobeying the ASBO can land you in prison for up to five years.

Not only is this a return to the Star Chamber method, it is also cheap and easy to administer. A magistrate issues it as a civil process, meaning a lower level of persuasion than would apply to a crime. Some specify things like criminal damage which are crimes anyway. The criminal law power of binding over to keep the peace is available for that purpose, but procedurally it is more onerous, of course.

In the first six years, about 10,000 ASBOs were issued. The process is legally wrong, even where someone was doing something offensive and truly antisocial. Moreover, there are bound to be many mistakes with such an undemanding procedure.

It is perfectly reasonable for society to provide for the investigation of suspected terrorists and the reining in of some people's appalling behaviour. Both could have been achieved fairly and lawfully if the appropriate effort had been put into the design of the laws. We do not need easy ways to put people we fear or dislike behind bars. We do need carefully thought out measures that involve judicial supervision every step of the way. An alternative package of anti-terrorism measures that does not arbitrarily deprive us of our liberty has recently been put forward by Liberty. It merits serious consideration, followed by adoption.

Human Rights Act

This Act is already available to mend the damage done by past legislation and to guard against repetition. It needs to be strengthened so that the House of Lords can declare primary legislation invalid if it interferes with the freedoms that are listed in the Act. It defies belief that a head of political steam is developing to repeal it - it is the only law we have that actively protects our freedoms.

The Act's wording may need some tightening up to make clear that it only covers what really are fundamental freedoms, not the clutter that has been attached to it by popular hy-

"[The ASBO] violates the basic tenet of the rule of law that you cannot be punished for doing something that was not a crime when you did it."

perbole. The government is minded to suggest a revision for this purpose, but we will not know how they propose to do that until the relevant green paper is published.

Courts should not be given too vague a remit or too much scope for “judicial activism.” Moderation is essential to keep the balance in the constitutional separation of powers. However, recent years have shown that the other powers are in need of the ultimate check provided by an independent Supreme Court.

The Act would be a sound basis for a bill of rights. The common law principles are conveniently listed in it via the European Convention. That sets out the minimum that a country must guarantee in order to be treated as civilised. It was agreed in the aftermath of Nazism. The rights set out in it are the most serious and the most worth fighting for. Like our common law freedoms, each has a blood-stained history that we should honour by ensuring that they are never violated again on a systematic government-led basis.

All the convention freedoms have their counterpart in the common law and vice versa. The emphasis on life, liberty and due process is shared. The common law pays more attention to property, but some aspects of the common law are found in the right to protection of one’s private life—“the Englishman’s home is his castle”.

Sources of Misunderstanding

Some of the hostility to the *Human Rights Act* comes from the wild claims made about it. Most of the sillier ones are just plain wrong. And all too often someone’s claim for what the Act does is misrepresented as a ruling, for purely prejudicial purposes.

In fact, the courts have applied the Act sparingly. The cases where it has been successfully invoked have been pretty reasonable. Examples include indefinite detention without being told why, and deportation to certain torture and possible death. The courts did not order hard core pornography to be supplied to a prisoner serving life for violent sex crimes. They even ruled against a claim that prosecution by speed camera was illegal for forcing the car owner to incriminate himself.

The mischief may come from a misreading of the Act’s statement that public authorities must apply its principles when performing

public functions, and from article 14 of the Convention on discrimination. Only fundamental rights bring either into play. Both provisions are therefore narrower than is generally believed.

Public functions cover the whole range of government activities, but only infringements of basic freedoms are forbidden by the Act. It is not violated by every instance of bad treatment at the hands of an official. The protection from discrimination on the grounds of sex, race, colour or other inherent human characteristics only arises if the act of discrimination threatens a person’s right to life, liberty, privacy etc, not if he is treated unequally in other ways, for instance in the provision of public services.

This distinction may seem harsh for the disadvantaged groups, but “human rights” have to be held separate from economic or social rights. The European Convention deliberately avoided these, unlike the UN Covenant. That guaranteed the right to work, housing, education and more. It has only rarely been given the force of law, mainly by the countries that automatically apply all UN treaties, like the Netherlands and Switzerland.

All good things like healthcare and housing cost money, and someone has to pay. We all expect them to some extent, but our expectations are in our capacity as taxpayers, not as human beings. Elected governments are in charge of spending. The results are part of politics, not part of our basic liberty. We should all be equally entitled to the benefits, but the government is answerable politically if this fails, not at the level of basic freedoms.

There is one overlap. William Blackstone, writing in the 18th century, said: “For there is no man so indigent or wretched, but he may demand a supply sufficient for all the necessities of life, from the more opulent part of the community.” He treated this as part of the protection of life and limb. It has its modern counterpart in the courts’ condemnation of the government’s total refusal of welfare support to refugees who live in this country but are not allowed to work. That was a breach of the *Human Rights Act*.

However, the extent of this protection is minimal. The victim’s plight must amount to destitution in order to rank as inhuman treatment under article 3 of the Convention. It will not be extended to every refusal to deploy public

“Some of the hostility to the *Human Rights Act* comes from the wild claims made about it.”

money to help an individual survive.

With this in mind, three types of “right” can be identified. First, the absolute right to life, freedom from torture, and the rule of law. Second, other basic rights, such as personal liberty, free speech and privacy, that are guaranteed as a matter of fundamental freedom but have to be balanced against each other and may be limited for the individual so that everyone else can also enjoy them to the full. Third, the economic or social rights that flow from prosperity and a comprehensive tax system are not fundamental freedoms at all. Unequal allocation is a political issue to be resolved through the ballot box.

Legislative Fog

Fundamental freedoms should also be kept separate from social entitlements partly for the sake of clarity—keeping the law as manageable as possible. Everyone should be able to grasp what his fundamental freedoms are without having to consult a highly-trained specialist.

The trend to legislative obfuscation invades freedom in its own right. The law has grown monumental and obscure. In many areas it is far too complicated for anyone except government as a whole to keep up with. Even the frontline officials who enforce it have difficulty mastering all the detail so that they can apply it correctly to the massive pile of files waiting for their attention (e.g. in the immigration or social security field).

Acts of Parliament no longer set out to provide a clear framework of legal principle that can be read as a sort of narrative. Nowadays sentences are short, subordinate clauses are rare and “hereinafter” never makes an appearance. Infuriatingly, this has done nothing for clarity.

Most Acts build on other Acts, so the latest one does its business by cross-referring to the older version. The reader is given a jigsaw to assemble, not a coherent account of what the legislator had in mind

Another flaw is leaving the detail to regulations that will be drawn up by ministries. This reduces Parliament’s participation in a highly undemocratic way, and makes it even harder to find out what the law is.

Regulations are not meant to be used to lay down primary law, but for things like dates of

entry into force and fee scales for public services. They can also be useful for administrative things like rules of court that regularly need amendment, or when they give instructions on how to do things that are not entirely obvious. An example is telling us that a knife used for cutting up raw meat should be washed before using it on cooked meat. The risk is not apparent from ordinary observation, yet the result of getting it wrong can be devastating.

Much of the growth in legislative bulk is down to law-making by statutory instrument. The annual number of Acts of Parliament has remained steady for decades at somewhere around 50, with more at the beginning of a government than at its end. Until 1985, the number of statutory instruments was in the region of 2,000 a year. It then started to rise. In 1992 it went through the 3,000 mark and has not fallen below it since. The average is now about 3,500. In 2001 it reached the all-time high of 4,150.

Even when an attempt is made to legislate coherently, the result can still be impenetrable. The *Companies Act 2006* took several years in the making, with useful public input through an open consultation process. The result is a monster, a third as long again as the New Testament. It has 1,300 sections running to 260,000 words; 197 sections create ministerial powers to issue regulations; 222 sections create criminal offences. At least one section empowers the minister to create an offence. Yet this is an Act that applies to the corner shop as much as to the biggest company in the land.

The law has grown technical, prescriptive and elitist. Whole areas are hived off to highly-paid professionals. Few of us are directly involved in the Private Finance Initiative or derivatives trading, but we should be able to find out how those things are governed if we want to know. No ordinary lawyer, let alone a layman, can do that now.

That is regrettable enough, but it is unacceptable that we should be unable to find out what is being done to our basic liberties. The law cannot be simple, but it should be accessible to someone willing to give time and effort to finding out. Intelligibility is surely fundamental to the rule of law. How else do we know what is forbidden?

“The law has grown technical, prescriptive and elitist.”

The Fog Thickens

Law now intrudes into the nooks and crannies of our daily lives. Here are a few examples of how things have changed in recent years.

The Bully: A law “justified” by the need to fight the so-called war on terror enabled the police to arrest an elderly man under the anti-terrorism laws for heckling a government minister. This power of arrest is vaguely defined and routinely invoked in all sorts of situations. The Home Office says that, of 1,228 arrests under the *Terrorism Act*, 241 were charged with terrorism-related crimes. Conviction under that Act followed for 41 of the 436 charged with crimes. More than half those arrested were not charged with anything. How this rate of unnecessary interference with liberty compares with other powers of arrest needs further research.

The Absolutist: We now have a minimum jail term for various firearms offences, including carrying a firearm in public, loaded or unloaded. Apart from murder, where “life” is the only option, we have never had such sentences. The aim to deter others outweighs normal principles of sentencing. The firearms crime does not call for proof of what most of us would view as a criminal intention. A lighter sentence is possible if the court finds “exceptional circumstances”, but this is not lightly done. A collector of memorabilia who bought a replica in ignorance of its convertibility was let off the minimum sentence, but the court said that a year in prison was appropriate nevertheless. Another collector, specifically of guns, had carelessly omitted to get a licence for a shotgun that he had inherited. He had to serve the minimum jail time. Both were of impeccable character, apart from the firearms offences.

The Spy: Dozens of government agencies have power to use covert surveillance to find out what we are doing or saying in private. Neither judges nor magistrates are involved at any stage. Spying on us in our homes and cars by devices placed outside can be done more or less as a matter of course. If an agency wants to place an intrusive device inside the building, it only needs the say-so of a senior officer or the agency head. Those armed with this power include the Office of Fair Trading, Ofcom and the Child Support Agency. At the domestic level, electronic spies in our rubbish bins have already been invented to monitor our recycling performance. I would wager that having

too large a “carbon footprint” will be criminal before long, easily proved by smart meters recording our use of electricity, gas and water.

The Prude: We used to be able to do risky things that have no impact on other people without fear of prosecution. Now it is a crime to smoke in public premises, including a pub where the publican and bar staff are also smokers, not to mention travelling alone in your car if you use one supplied by your employer. The idea of making more public places available for non-smokers does not mean that consenting adults who do something in a public place that is otherwise wholly lawful have to become criminals.

The Nanny: The anti-smoking law has opened the door to laws forbidding us to do things because the harm they do us may put a burden on the exchequer. The mind reels at what will come out of the current campaign against those who are overweight, let alone those who drink injudiciously at home. A commercial application of radio frequency ID can already have your fridge email you at work with a reminder to pick up a pint of milk on the way home. The same technology could easily record our eating and drinking habits, then notify the doctor that we are “at risk.” We might then be refused medical treatment on the ground that we are recklessly self-indulgent, or even prosecuted once they have thought up an appropriate crime.

The Geek: Technology is already available that will allow government officials to follow our every move into our most private moments. Computer processing power roughly doubles every 18 months. That will make it work much faster and more efficiently. This gives the edge of urgency to the quest for a bill of rights. Technology is a good thing in itself, or at least neutral, but we do need to consider how much easier it will be for government to intrude into our private lives and liberties in future. The Information Commissioner, Richard Thomas, issued an important report on the “surveillance society” last year that has not received as much attention as it deserves.

Conclusion

Two fairly simple things are needed for the UK statute-book: removal of the present encroachments on our fundamental freedoms and addition of a tough bill of rights to make sure that they are not encroached on again in future. It would be useful if the Supreme

“Law now intrudes into the nooks and crannies of our daily lives.”

Court could be asked its opinion of a new law during the legislative process, as happens in France.

The general complexity and obscurity of the law cannot be cured so easily. Rewriting it all is not a realistic option. Some small steps might help. The updated plain language guide that accompanies a new bill could be made easily accessible alongside the final text once it has been enacted. This was tried once, but the government used this simple and technical device to base exaggerated claims for its new demotic approach to law-making. That drew public ridicule to the exercise, and it has not apparently been repeated. More important, the online version of an Act should set out in full the clause from older legislation that has been amended. A link to the full text of the older Act should always be given. Links should be added for every statutory instrument issued under an Act or affecting its operation.

Judges could help by giving us an outline of what they are deciding. To avoid spending a lot of money on what we rarely need, most of

us now use the online text rather than a commercial law report to which the editors have added a summary. An important judgment may run to 30,000 words. Without a guide to what has been decided, the labour is immense and it is all too easy to miss what is important.

Disrespect for the law will grow unless it is made clearer to ordinary folk. It would be a welcome start if someone in authority acknowledged that the difficulties we have with the law are indeed a problem.



Celia Hampton is a barrister who has worked for many years as a freelance legal writer and editor. Her work has ranged from a legal textbook on criminal procedure to editing *Business Law Europe* for *Financial Times Newsletters*. For some years she has specialised in European law and currently writes regularly on competition and financial law. She is actively involved in the Association of European Journalists. This essay was originally delivered as a talk to the SIF at the House of Lords on the 23rd October 2007.

“Disrespect for the law will grow unless it is made clearer to ordinary folk.”



Two recent SIF speakers pictured at the Libertarian Alliance/Libertarian International conference held in London in October 2007:
Dr Syed Kamall MEP (below) and **Dr Tim Evans** (above).
Photographs by **David Farrer**, LA treasurer and owner of the Freedom & Whisky blog (<http://freedomandwhisky.blogspot.com>).



SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT GUNS AND VIOLENCE

Richard Garner

If, as libertarians believe, every individual has the right to own his person and property, it then follows that he has the right to employ violence to defend himself against the violence of criminal aggressors... If guns are restricted or outlawed, there is no reason to expect that determined criminals are going to pay much attention to the law. The criminals, then, will always be able to purchase and carry guns; it will only be their innocent victims who will suffer from the solicitous liberalism that imposes laws against guns and other weapons. – Murray N. Rothbard – For a New Liberty

The Common View

One of the more widely read newspapers in the UK is the *Metro*. Widely read because it is free and given out to commuters on their way to work. Anyway, in the letters page of the *Metro* of Monday, April 23rd 2007 H. Goodeve questioned Americans' disbelief that their high rate of gun crimes is due to their more liberal gun laws. He claims that there are 30,000 gun related deaths in the US last year compared to the UK's 60, and points to this as self-evident proof that gun controls, which are stronger in the UK than in the US, reduce gun crime. The sad thing is that this is a widely held assumption in the UK: the UK has fewer guns and fewer gun crimes, therefore gun crime occurs because the laws are not strong enough and guns are too easy to get hold of. However the connection between liberal gun laws and a high gun crime rate is very questionable.

The US does have a high murder rate, that is true. There are 5.9 murders per 100,000 people a year in the US. What Mr (or Mrs) Goodeve neglects is the fact that this number varies widely throughout the US, as do gun laws and the percentage of the people who own guns. Unlike the UK (or at least England and Wales), the US does not have a uniform system of gun laws. Whilst the UK has a set of statutes imposed centrally by the national government on the entire nation, the US has a baseline of statute provided by the Federal Government that is either added to or not by the various other levels of government, from the state, to the county, to the city level. Given this, it is false to say that the US uni-

formly has liberal gun laws whilst the UK does not. In some places the gun laws are very liberal, but in others they are very tight. This disparity throughout the US can inform us as to whether or not there is a correlation between high rates of gun ownership and high violent crime rates, murder rates, or gun crime rates.

A Look at the Reality

The five states with the highest murder rates are Washington D.C. 35.8, Louisiana 12.7, Maryland 9.4, New Mexico 8.9., Missouri 7.8. This gives an average murder rate in the worst five states as 14.92 per 100,000. The five best states are North Dakota 1.4, New Hampshire 1.4, Iowa 1.6, Utah 1.9, Wyoming 2.2, yielding an average murder rate in these five best states of 1.7.

The percentage of the population owning guns in the five states with the worst murder rates are Washington D.C. 3.8%, Louisiana 44.1%, Maryland 21.3%, New Mexico 34.8%, Missouri 41.7%. The first thing to note is that these figures vary wildly, from the area with the worst murder rate, DC, having only 3.8% owning guns to the second worst having as many as 44.1%, This in itself serves to cast doubt on the correlation of lots of guns to lots of murders. However, the average percentage of the population owning guns in these five states with the worst murder rates is 29.4%. The percentage of the population owning guns in the states with the lowest murder rates is North Dakota 50.7%, New Hampshire 30%, Iowa 42.8%, Utah 43.9%, Wyoming 59.7%. This yields an average percentage population of the five states with the lowest murder rates in the US as 40.2%. *In other words the States of the US that have the lowest murder rates have a higher percentage of the population owning guns than the states with the highest murder rates.* There is definitely no correlation between high murder rates and lax gun laws or high numbers of guns from the American evidence, then.

In fact, these five states with the lowest murder rates, in which, on average 40.2% of the population own a gun or guns, have an average

“... the USA does not have a uniform system of gun laws.”

murder rate of 1.7 per 100,000 people. The average murder rate in England and Wales is 1.5 per 100,000, scarcely lower. In Scotland it is 2.2 per 100,000, worse than in these five gun toting states. Meanwhile the US suffers, on average, half as many burglaries than the UK, and in the US 12% of burglaries occur whilst the victim is at home, whilst 53% of burglaries in the UK occur whilst the victim is home.

Take a look at what percentage of the population owns guns in the five most heavily armed states. That's Wyoming 59.7%, Alaska 57.8%, Montana 57.7%, South Dakota 56.6% and West Virginia 55.4%. That's an average of 57.44% of the population owning guns in these five most heavily armed states. The murder rates per 100,000 people in these states are, Wyoming 2.2, Alaska 5.6, Montana 3.2, South Dakota 2.3, West Virginia 3.7. That's an average murder rate in these most heavily armed states of 3.4 people per 100,000. Violent crimes per 100,000 in these states are, Wyoming 229.6, Alaska 634.5 (Alaska suffers from a shockingly high number of rapes compared to other states), Montana 293.8, South Dakota 171.5, West Virginia 271.2. The average total of all violent crimes in these states, then, is 320.12.

Now compare this with the least heavily armed state's and districts. The percentage of the population who own guns in Washington DC is 3.8%, in Hawaii its 8.7%, New Jersey 12.3%, Massachusetts 12.6% and Rhode Island 12.8%. So the average percentage of the population owning guns is 10.04%. Murder rates per 100,000 in these least heavily armed states are: Washington DC 35.8, Hawaii 2.6, New Jersey 4.5, Massachusetts 2.6, Rhode Island 2.4. That's an average of 9.58. If we exclude Washington DC's supernormal level of murders (which perhaps we shouldn't, but since it is so far above the average it may not be representative), that's an average of 3.025. Violent crimes per 100,000 people is Washington DC 1,371.2, Hawaii 254.4, New Jersey 355.7, Massachusetts 458.8, Rhode Island 247.4. That's an average of 537.5. Excluding Washington DC, that's an average of 329.075.

One earlier reader of this article in its original blog form ignored the above paragraph in which I provided figures both including and

excluding Washington DC, and claimed that the inclusion of the District distorted the findings. His claim was that the gun ownership rate in DC is actually quite a lot higher than the stats indicate because most people in the district own their guns illegally. Add to this, the fact that murderers are crossing state lines to/from Virginia and Maryland into the mix and you can see how completely useless that figure is. However, I suspected that gun ownership was wider in DC than the official statistics due to illegal imports (just like here in the UK gun ownership is wide taking account of illegal ownership).

However, given the slogan "when owning guns is outlawed, only outlaws will have guns," the possibility that prohibition concentrates gun ownership in the hands of criminals



may effect the rate of gun crime in DC. In other words, is it because of the strict gun laws that means that guns are mostly owned by criminals, and why criminals cross from Virginia and Maryland

to victimise the disarmed non-criminal citizens of the District, that could partially account for the reason that gun crime is higher in this state where guns are owned primarily by criminals than they are in states where ownership is widespread and not just by criminals? Just a possibility.

The fact that potential victims of crime are more likely to be armed in states where gun ownership is legal and widespread, thus providing criminals with a deterrent against crime, is one plausible explanation for the results of this article. Where this deterrent is lacking, in disarmed states, there is an incentive for criminals to buy guns in states where purchase and ownership is more liberal, and then use them over state lines in crimes where, due to prohibition, victims are less likely to be able to protect themselves.

So, let's summarise. The five states with the largest percentage of the population owning guns average at 57.44%. The average percentage of the population owning guns in the least heavily armed states is 10.04%. However, the average murder rate per 100,000 people in the most heavily armed states is 3.4. The average murder rate in the least heavily armed states is 9.58, nearly three times as high. Even if we adjust for Washington DC's supernormal mur-

"... when owning guns is outlawed, only outlaws will have guns..."

der rate, and exclude it, that's 3.025, fairly comparable. The average rate of violent crimes per 100,000 in the most heavily armed states is 320.12. In the least heavily armed states it is 537.5.

In short, the five most heavily armed states have a lower average murder rate than the five least heavily armed states. Even on the more favourable measure it is comparable. And the five most heavily armed states have less violent crime and the five least heavily armed states.

Further Evidence from Europe

Further support for American scepticism that high gun related deaths correlate with high rates of gun ownership can be derived from Europe. In Switzerland 27% of homes contain at least one gun. Yet the homicide rate in Switzerland is only 1.1 per 100,000 people, which is lower than in Britain. A third of homes in Norway have a gun. And the murder rate is fewer than one per 100,000, far lower than in Britain.

In fact, just look at what has occurred since the handgun ban in the UK. The BBC reports that the number of recorded gun crimes in the UK rose to more than 21,500 last year compared to just under 14,000 in 1998. That's a more than fifty percent increase. Meanwhile the number of gun-related homicides has barely altered at all from the year in which the handgun ban was introduced. The number of people injured by firearms in England and Wales has more than doubled since 1998. The number of recorded firearm crimes in 2005/2006 was 11,084 - up 0.12% on previous year. Likewise, in 1976 Washington DC introduced some of the strictest gun controls in the US, and now only 3.8% of the population own guns. The murder rate rose 134% whilst the murder rate for the whole US fell 2%.

There is, therefore, little evidence from the US supporting a correlation between high rates of gun ownership and high murder rates. In fact, a greater percentage of the population in the states with the lowest murder rates own guns than in the states with the worst murder rates. Moreover, those states which have the best murder rates, where on average 40% of the population own at least one gun, have a murder rate comparable to that of the UK and about three quarters that of Scotland. Norway and Switzerland have similar rates of gun ownership as the US and a lower murder rate than the UK. And gun crime has got worse as gun

laws have got stricter in the UK.

There is no evidence of a positive correlation between the rate of gun ownership and the rate of murder, on the contrary, it seems negative; and there is no evidence that stricter gun laws either reduce the supply of guns or reduce the number of gun crimes.

An Addendum

I must make a few additional comments. One reviewer of this article in its original blog form suggested that I had made an error. It was observed that I had started by saying that "However, the connection between liberal gun laws and a high gun crime rate is very questionable," but ended by saying "There is, therefore, little evidence from the US supporting a correlation between high rates of gun ownership and high murder rates." Apparently, I had refuted a different proposition from the one I claimed to countering. I had switched from "gun murder rates" to "overall murder rates" at some point. H. Goodeve had asserted that there was a correlation between liberal gun laws and high *overall* crime rates. My critic suggested that looking at my statistics, and using the rates for *gun* crime—not overall crime—as these are the crimes that I had set out to address, my argument proves the original assertion that I had set out to question.

I actually suspect these criticisms are on target: the statistics I used did switch from gun crime and gun murder rates to murder in general. However, I suspect my critic's conclusion may be false. The statistics I was able to find from a Google search suggested that the percentage of murders that are committed with a gun is lower in heavily armed states than in states where the populace is less well armed.

The percentage of the population who own guns in the least heavily armed states (excluding Washington DC) are Hawaii 8.7%, New Jersey 12.3%, Massachusetts 12.6% and Rhode Island 12.8%. The percentage of murders by gun in Hawaii is 43.5%, in New Jersey 61%, in Massachusetts 47.4% and in Rhode Island 63.4%.

The four most heavily armed states, the ones where the percentage of the population owning guns is highest, are Wyoming, at 59.7%, Alaska at 57.8%, Montana 57.7% and South Dakota 56.6%. The percentage of murders committed with a gun in Wyoming is 40%, in

"In Switzerland 27% of homes contain at least one gun. Yet the homicide rate in Switzerland ... is lower than in Britain."

Alaska 52.9%, in Montana 50% and in South Dakota 33%.

The average rate of gun ownership in the four least-heavily armed states is 11.6%. The average murder rate in the four least heavily armed states is 3.025 people in 100,000. The average percent of the murders that is committed by gun in these least heavily armed states is 53.82%.

The average rate of gun ownership in the most heavily armed states is 57.95%. The average murder rate in the most heavily armed states is 3.325 people in 100,000. The average percentage of these murders that is committed by gun is 43.97%.

So you are only slightly more likely to be murdered in one of the states where gun ownership is most widespread than you are in one of the states where it is least widespread, but you are much less likely to be killed with a gun in states where gun ownership is most widespread than you are in states where gun ownership is least widespread.

Moreover, the figures I have used have been percentage of homicides committed by gun, not percentage of murders. Homicides can include lawful killings. This would make the actual percentage of murders committed by guns even lower. On top of this, I only had figures on gun-caused homicides for the states, not districts. I have no doubt that statistics for DC would tip things even further in favour of gun ownership.

In any event, "the common view" is not as "obvious" as many would have us believe!

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Richard Garner is a free-market anarchist living in Nottingham. He runs his own blog at <http://richardgarnerlib.blogspot.com> and this essay is based on posts to the blog made in October 2007.



Nigel Meek, editor of the Society for Individual Freedom and the Libertarian Alliance, pictured at the Libertarian Alliance and Libertarian International Conference held in London in October 2007. Photograph by **David Farrer**.

“... the “common view” is not as obvious as many would have us believe!”

SOCIETY FOR INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM MINUTES OF THE 2007 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The meeting was held at the Westminster Arms, Storey's Gate, London, SW1P 3AT on the 18th September 2007 and commenced at 5.30pm

Present: Michael Plumbe, Dr Barry Bracewell-Milnes, Professor David Myddelton, Lucy Ryder, Nigel Meek, Rhoda Zeffertt, Jenny Wakley, David Wedgwood, Major Peter Wakley, Robert Henderson and Andrew Brown. Apologies from Don Furness and Howard Hammond-Edgar.

It was agreed that in the absence of Lord Monson, Professor David Myddelton would act as Chairman of the meeting.

(1) **The minutes of the previous AGM** held on 31st October 2006 were approved.

(2) **Chairman's Report:** Michael Plumbe presented his annual report, copies of which were distributed to all present.

Meetings with Speakers

We have only managed to hold two meetings with speakers this year. The first, after our AGM in October, was given by Dr Syed Kamall MEP. This was a real wake-up call to the horrors of the EU in terms of the cost to us and the legislation being poured onto our Statute Book. Then in May Dr Tim Evans gave us a talk on "Global Corporatism and Modern British Political Economy: A Libertarian Perspective".

Both meetings were adequately attended and generated considerable debate in the question-and-answer sessions at the end. We are as usual most grateful to our speakers for their time and trouble and to Nigel Meek for inviting them to be with us. Nigel also capably prepared flyers for the meetings and distributed details on the internet.

We have not had a luncheon in

the Houses of Parliament for some time. However, at the invitation of Lord Monson, we do now have a date fixed for such an event, on Tuesday 23rd October in the House of Lords. From what we have read and heard so far, our speaker, Celia Hampton, a senior financial journalist, will be giving us a thought-provoking and most interesting talk. We are grateful to Sir Richard Body for introducing her to us.

I confess to some doubt about the value of holding public meetings nowadays. So much information and discussion can be handled on the Internet that, apart from the personal contact, not a lot is gained from meetings which cannot be obtained more easily by other means.

Campaigns and Projects

About the only external project we have handled this year has been to be involved with the Campaign for Freedom of Information to protest when proposals to exempt MPs from the Freedom of Information Act were put forward. Robert Henderson prepared an important paper on this matter and Michael Champness had a watching brief. Of course Parliament voted the proposals through. Details can be found on our website.

No action has been needed on the Tell-IT (Information for Patients) campaign although we have kept an eye on the position.

Nigel Meek has put a lot of work into bringing our website up-to-date, with the help of website designers, Buzzin' Fly. Nigel and our webmaster Howard Hammond-Edgar have ensured that material on the website is regularly updated. The result is a

"The result is a smart, relevant site which gets a reasonable number of hits now."

smart, relevant site which gets a reasonable number of hits now. From time to time we even get new members as a result.

I repeat, from earlier years, my hope that one day we shall have the resources to do something on Research into Censorship. Also our Treasurer, Lucy Ryder, wants to carry out an exercise comparing the legislation in different countries, mainly in Europe, as regards freedom issues. This could be a useful project if anyone can volunteer to take it on.

We are mindful that every day brings closer the time when we shall be issued with Identity Cards. I am sure that there is an EU Directive somewhere which states that we must have these cards. Once such an edict has been promulgated there is no way our MPs can do anything to stop things going ahead. This is appalling but what can we do? Our protests mean nothing.

From time to time we also monitor other legislation and its effect, especially where it curtails individual freedom. However we would need far greater resources than we have if we were to try to roll back the tide. If any member feels able to help with work of this nature, we shall be glad to hear. I would in this context refer to the invaluable service provided by Robert Henderson with a never-ending stream of e-mails on all manner of topics, mainly concerning bad law.

We have had a couple of pleas for help from people with particular problems in seeking justice. Whilst we cannot take up such matters directly, we have been able to give ideas on where assistance may be available.

The Individual

As ever *The Individual* is the one

thing which keeps the Society going. Nigel Meek has done his usual magic, both as Editor and as occasional contributor. I often get comments, from members and non-members alike, on the excellent quality of this journal.

May I here acknowledge once again this year an important donation to funds from one member. Without this help it would be difficult to continue publishing *The Individual*.

Choice in Personal Safety

It seems as if the legislation compelling people to use seatbelts is becoming ever more Draconian. Even passengers in coaches are now being "encouraged" to "belt up". Yet Don Furness regularly finds instances where seatbelts have been lethal to the wearers. Also, as Lord Monson has said, drivers feel safer with the belts on and there is evidence to suggest that motorists then become more reckless. So, against heavy odds, CIPS still keeps plugging away in the hope that our legislators will see sense one day. Barry Bracewell-Milnes has nobly done much to support CIPS by attending its committee meetings, usually being the only person there (apart from Don).

I repeat that Don has a valuable archive of material collected from the first years of the existence of CIPS. If anyone can help to store this, please let Don know.

Representation on Campaign for Freedom of Information

The CFoI does not now seek "subscriptions" as such but it still needs some funds for its important work. We have again made a suitable contribution accordingly.

"... we have been able to give ideas on where assistance may be available."

Officers and Committee

Including tonight, your committee has met three times this year. In May we were able again to fix the meeting on the same day as we had a speaker. This saves much travelling for several of us. We are glad indeed that Professor David Myddelton is now able to take more part in our proceedings.

Otherwise it is the same group of people who keep the Society functioning. Jenny Wakley and Rhoda Zeffertt, although they have to go abroad quite a bit, do their best to look after secretarial matters (and prod the Chairman into action when necessary). Lucy Ryder has control of our money and ensures our continued solvency. Nigel Meek, in addition to his editorial duties, handles our membership records, pursues those who are laggardly about paying their dues, and, with Howard Hammond-Edgar, organises our website. Lord Monson always attends meetings if he can and contributes valuable opinions and advice. Cynthia Campbell-Savours has had but little to do on organising functions but has been able usefully to offer her views on various matters. Barry Bracewell-Milnes regularly attends our meetings and is our guru on constitutional matters. David Wedgwood continues to be a stalwart member of the committee.

The Future

Is a little bleak. With the major exception of that paragon, Nigel Meek, all those involved with running the Society are a trifle long-in-the-tooth. Dearly would I like to pass on the Chairman's baton to someone a third, or even half, my age. But there is no one on the horizon. Yet increasingly we find that our Individual Freedom, once so cheerful, congenial, civilized and cherished, is clandestinely compro-

mised, comprehensively curtailed, churlishly constrained and capriciously clipped by constipated chisellers. We compliantly capitulate as "comrade citizen ciphers" and are too crassly complaisant to complain.

So the SIF must soldier on... Or do our best to, at least.

Discussion: The Chairman said that we should expect to see more activity in the coming year with some good ideas from David Myddelton.

Jenny Wakley will enquire if there is any news from Tell-IT. We may do a project for Lucy Ryder on comparative legislation in freedom in the different European countries. He complimented Don Furness on all he does for CIPS.

Robert Henderson proposed that we should have debates rather than speakers. He reported on Freedom of Information. The Bill proposing that Parliament should be outside the scope of the Act was being opposed by the House of Lords. He felt that Freedom of Information was in general well worth while. He also proposed we should have a blitz on membership using e-mails.

Barry Bracewell-Milnes proposed that general members should be willing to replace individual generous donations (see Chairman's Report) if it became necessary.

Jenny Wakley said that she considered that *The Individual* is not the only thing that keeps the Society going. It is perhaps the main thing, but she felt that the website was also an important contribution.

The Chairman's Report was adopted.

(3) Treasurer's Report: Lucy Ryder presented her annual report. In the year ended 30th June 2007 total receipts were £3083 and total expenditure was £2795 (figures rounded). In addition the SIF has various reserves and investments along with very small liabilities. She also told the meeting that she considered that the money spent on the new website had been well spent.

The Chairman said that we have to use the money we have on useful activities in the field of freedom. Nigel Meek referred to a biography of Ernest Benn, one of the SIF's founders,

that could well be reprinted.

The Treasurer's Report was adopted.

(4) **The members of the National Council due for re-election** who have agreed to continue to serve are: Dr Victor Bloom, Sir Richard Body, Cynthia Campbell-Savours, Michael Champness, Lord Monson, Professor David Myddelton, Geoffrey Pearl and Ralph Shuffrey. They were unanimously re-elected.

(5) **The following Officers of the Society**

have agreed to serve for the coming year and were unanimously re-elected: Lord Monson (President), Professor David Myddelton (Vice President and Chairman of the National Council), Sir Richard Body (Vice President), Barry Bracewell-Milnes (Vice President), Lucy Ryder (Treasurer), Michael Plumbe (Chairman of the Executive Committee), and Rhoda Zeffertt and Jenny Wakley (Joint Secretaries).

(6) **Any Other Business:** None.

The Chairman closed the meeting at 6.05pm.

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**SOCIETY FOR INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM
MINUTES OF THE 2007 NATIONAL COUNCIL MEETING**

The meeting was held directly after the AGM.

(1) **Chairman's Report:** Professor David Myddelton reported that he had nothing to report. The National Council is there as a safety net in case of trouble and there had been no trouble.

(2) **Election of the further members of the Executive Committee:** Cynthia Campbell-Savours (Social Secretary), Nigel Meek (Editor and Membership Secretary), Howard

Hammond-Edgar (Webmaster) and Don Furness (Chairman of Choice in Personal Safety) were unanimously re-elected to serve another year. David Wedgwood was re-elected to serve another year as a member of the Executive Committee.

(3) **Any Other Business:** There was nothing to report.

The Chairman closed the meeting at 6.10pm.

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GORDON BROWN: GO NOW!
Amber Astron-Christo

Economists, journalists and MPs who hailed Gordon Brown as Chancellor are those with a vision only for the short term. It is my belief that Brown has put his own personal ambition before the needs of the country, and that history will judge him as a total failure as Prime Minister and as the Chancellor who left the British economy on a knife edge. Gordon Brown could not afford a faltering economy *before* claiming the Labour leadership and has sacrificed the country's fu-

ture economic and social stability for that ends.

Labour inherited a reasonably buoyant economy from the Tories, when Blair took over the Premiership and installed Brown as Chancellor. And Labour went on a spending spree. Trouble was, Brown's figures didn't add up, so he had to borrow *big time* from the World Bank. He has indebted this country to levels never seen before; sold

"The National Council is there as a safety net in case of trouble and there had been no trouble."

off the country's gold reserves; introduced a barrage of stealth taxes; and snatched pensions from the old and vulnerable. Money poured into health and education has gone down the drain. (Brown the 'prudent' Chancellor failed to check how it would be spent.) We see bankrupt and failing hospitals and schools.

The NHS can no longer afford health care for all: if you are old—tough! If you live in the 'wrong' area—tough! If you have the 'wrong' disease—tough! Home trained doctors and nurses cannot get jobs, but lesser trained and 'temp' staff who have no long term commitment to their post are paid inflated wages to fill in short term. We have sick people lying in their own vomit and faeces and no one does anything to stop it. The press reports of the filth and decay of the NHS escalate in both number and horror. But still no one does anything!

The scene is repeated in education. Highly experienced and qualified teachers cannot get work—schools can not afford to employ them. Instead, supply teachers are drafted in—the agencies supplying them demanding inflated fees. Some schools are now using unqualified teachers to front classrooms. Money is wasted training primary teachers: the numbers trained far exceed the number of jobs available, but it ensures a constant supply of cheap, bottom of the scale staff. Teachers and parents dip into their pockets to buy books and equipment. Children with special needs are not statemented (given a Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) by the Local Education Authority); the process is drawn out for as long as possible to save money because statemented children, by law, must have their needs met. Record numbers of children are failing to learn the basics of literacy and numeracy. Primary teachers are now only receiving one year's training (and some claim there is no connection with falling standards).

Brown held the purse strings and was compliant in all of the Blair Government failings. The blood of the under-funded troops in Iraq who died because they had inadequate equipment is on Brown's hands. He is not fit to lick their boots, but used them as a 'prop' in the obscene propaganda coup about returning troops from Iraq staged during the recent Tory conference.

Brown has blown the economic legacy left by

the Tories and the only reason the 'intellectuals' 'pretended' not to notice previously was that the grossly over-inflated property prices have bankrolled the economy for the last decade as well as enabling the spending spree the whole nation has indulged in. Individual bankruptcy and family debt has risen alongside the country's debt to the World Bank. Families have been encouraged to take out mortgages more than six times their salary, and now with an insecure job market, the juddering of the American sub-prime mortgage sector and the recent tremors in Northern Rock, it is at last being acknowledged that the economy might falter or even crash if the property linchpin gives way. There is little real enterprise culture, our manufacturing base has all but disappeared, and the service sector jobs remaining are in leisure and entertainment and depend upon people having surplus cash in their pockets. That spending power has depleted during Labour's reign as families try to keep up with ever-increasing costs for day-to-day existence.

In addition to cocking up the economy, Gordon Brown has now lied about the EU treaty/constitution and has just signed away Britain's future. He lied about safeguarding British jobs for British workers: EU Laws prevail. This isn't democracy. British families are being displaced from the 'stakeholder' economy. They can't afford to work for minimum wage and are being labelled lazy good-for-nothings while migrants are flooding the job market and being used, not because they are filling a skills gap—the Learning and Skills Council and various government departments have been unable to identify the skills in which we have a shortage—but because they are a source of very cheap labour—most low paid jobs are unskilled. Meanwhile Brown has imported a tax credit system from America which uses taxpayers' money to subsidise the low wages of private companies.

To cap it all, we in addition have a total erosion of privacy and personal security as Brown and this paranoid government infiltrate every aspect of our individual lives. They tell us information gathering is necessary for our personal protection—of course, this is another pack of lies and simply makes us more vulnerable to ID fraud. It looks like it will end with a centrally-controlled European data bank of all European citizens, and that we may be on the road to the development of

"To cap it all, we in addition have a total erosion of privacy..."

"Tell them to GO NOW!"

an undemocratic fascist Europe.



Many of the issues currently facing the country have been created by the government's own legislation. Make your views known through the media, press and internet, and to your MP. Brown and his government are intellectually, morally and spiritually bankrupt. Tell them to GO NOW!

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Amber Astron-Christo, a teacher by profession, is a long-time supporter of the SIF. When talking to the SIF's Editor about this article—her first for the SIF since June 1998—she cheerfully described it as a "rant"!



Government Project Disasters...

"Politicians without a commercial background often seem not to care much about the end-customer for their projects. They tend to concentrate (though not always very effectively) on the cost of the inputs rather than on the value of outputs: that is one reason why the state schooling and health monopolies have such dreadfully poor results. 'Investment' as such is not a 'good thing', as some statesmen pretend or imply: it is merely spending in the hope of a future benefit. What is a good thing in the market system is profitable investment, and what makes it so is the profit! That means getting back from satisfied customers more than the total cost (including interest on capital)."

From David Myddelton, *They Meant Well: Government Project Disasters*, London, Institute of Economic Affairs, 2007, p. 210.

The Chairman of the SIF's National Council, *Professor David Myddelton*, has recently had published an illuminating study of 20th century, government-sponsored projects: the R.101 Airship (1922-30), the groundnut scheme (1946-54), nuclear power (1958-78-ongoing), Concorde (1956-1976-2003), the Channel Tunnel (1985-1994-2007) and the Millennium Dome (1995-2000-ongoing).

Naturally we are biased, but it's a fascinating if dispiriting read for anyone interested in economics, politics or history. It can be purchased in hardcopy from the IEA or downloaded free from the IEA's website. Details at www.iea.org.uk.

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The SIF's Aim:

"To promote responsible individual freedom"

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.

The SIF promotes...

- ✓ The freedom, importance and personal responsibility of the individual.
- ✓ The sovereignty of Parliament and its effective control over the Executive.
- ✓ The rule of law and the independence of the Judicature.
- ✓ Free enterprise.

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 the 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