

**In this issue:**

- The secret police: An unnecessary evil?
- What to do about the control fetishists?
- Get the State out of healthcare!
- And a scattering of libertarian wit and wisdom.

## FREEDOM AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Much of this issue of *The Individual* is taken up with two contributions that look at issues of pressing concern: Robert Henderson on the “security services” and Joe Peacott on “healthcare”. One does not have to be a Marxist—far from it—to accept that the social environment in which one is brought up can have an impact on one’s attitudes and behaviour, at least “on average”. Yet the belief by some that there is this or that political system that will make mankind anew, free from “sin”, is surely utopianism. Given this, there will always be a need for some kind of police and security forces, albeit not necessarily belonging to the State. But these organisations and the people in them will almost inevitably possess powers—*de jure* or *de facto*—beyond those of “ordinary” citizens. This raises many concerns for libertarians and others dedicated to defending civil liberties. Mr Henderson argues that one of the obvious responses is that such organisations are already far too numerous.

Joe Peacott’s essay, and particularly his comments on the unwillingness of many to take responsibility for their own health, reminds me of a former colleague of mine. An intelligent and educated young man, he found himself with wisdom teeth that had suddenly de-

cidated to put in an appearance. Did he seek the prompt treatment that a private dentist could have offered? Not a bit of it. He suffered weeks of severe pain—to the detriment of his work—whilst waiting for treatment on the “free” NHS. Could he have afforded private treatment? Certainly. Providing, that is, just for once he was prepared to forgo his annual two weeks holiday in God-knows-where. I thought at the time that this was a bizarre set of priorities...

Finally, whilst still on the subject of contributors to this issue, it is a privilege to publish the partly tongue-in-cheek, partly very serious essay by Peter Curry. As noted at the end of his essay, Mr Curry is one the SIF’s “senior” members and remains a staunch supporter of its activities. As he notes, he thought that the State was oppressive back in his childhood days. And look at things now! The “struggle” against authoritarianism continues!



That said... We’re not going to get very far if organisations such as the SIF are handicapped by the attitudes of some of its so-

(continued on page 15...)

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## SECRET SERVICES: A CONSPIRACY AGAINST THE PUBLIC

Robert Henderson

### INTRODUCTION

Are security and intelligence organisations such as Special Branch, MI5 and MI6 necessary or desirable? (For convenience's sake I shall refer to such organisations collectively as the security services.) They are such an embedded part of our society that to question the need for their existence would seem to most people as nonsensical as asking why we have police. But that is no more than the power of habit. Looked at with a cold eye there is good reason to consider such services a political threat to any society which wishes to maintain its freedom and at least a degree of democratic control over the elite, and a positive practical danger to any society because of the frequent unreliability of intelligence, through incompetence, deliberate subversion from within or "black" operations by foreign intelligence organisations.

### SECRECY AND DEMOCRACY

The obvious but often ignored truth about security and intelligence work is that it has a quality which is unambiguously incompatible with democracy. That quality is secrecy.

State secrecy eats away at democratic control. Unless an electorate has the right to know what the state is doing in any aspect of its work, unlimited mischief can be perpetrated. Justice can be perverted, crimes commissioned, treason committed, political policies subverted, elections manipulated and the lives of individuals maliciously ruined, all with little chance of discovery and next to no chance of prosecution even where the public does find out about the wrongdoing.

The most enraging document I have ever read is the *Hansard* report of the Commons debate the day before war was declared in 1914 and Britain entered the most disastrous conflict in its and Europe's history. It is clear from *Hansard* that the grave and novel dangers of entering into a war with modern technology were well understood by many MPs. Worse, the pathetic and repulsive evasions of the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, showed that Parliament and consequently the British people had been kept in the dark over the secret agreement between the British and French Governments concluded around the time of the Anglo-French entente (the *Entente Cordiale* of 1904), which obligated Britain to go to war if France was attacked. And so off Britain went to the trenches for four long years, ostensibly because of an 1839 treaty Britain had signed guaran-

teeing Belgium's sovereignty, but in reality because the British elite of the time had committed itself to the French elite without any Parliamentary oversight or agreement.

Democracy and openness of government go hand in hand. Free expression and a free media are an integral part of democracy, but they can formally exist and yet be restricted to the point where democratic control is effectively nil in some areas of politics because secrecy is successfully practised by government, as it is in Britain. The security services are the prime example of such a lack of control.

### WHO SHALL GUARD THE GUARDS?

This is a question about elites which never becomes hackneyed because of its perpetual and pressing importance. But there is a prior question in a country with security services, namely, who are the guards? Are they the politicians with the ostensible power or are they the security services? Or are politicians and security services locked in a ghastly mutually compromising and compromised embrace? The ability of security forces to become a law unto themselves is epitomised by the KGB, which ended up as a state within a state.

The British government adopts the general line of "we never make statements on matters affecting national security". Ask a question of a minister with security implications and he will trot out the "we never comment" on security matters or "we neither confirm nor deny whether X has or has not happened". In effect, they are asking for a blank cheque from not only the general public but the vast majority of MPs.

This institutionalised secrecy undermines any attempt by politicians outside the Government (and probably most within it) to control the security services. MI5 and MI6 are in theory overseen by a Commons Select Committee (the Intelligence and Security Committee), but in reality they are no more than a fig leaf of political oversight. Their impotence is epitomised by their annual report, much of which is not published for, yes you've guessed it, security reasons.

### THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR BLACKMAIL

Rumour has it that the first person a newly installed PM meets is the head of MI5 who provides him with a security file on each candidate for a position in the Government. Whether this

"Who shall guard the guards?"

is the exact truth or not it must be close to it, because government ministers have to have security vetting and there is simply not time to conduct a thorough investigation of would-be ministers in a new Government after an election because a government must be formed immediately. That implies that many, possibly all, MPs have an MI5 file kept on them.

If MI5 holds such files, the opportunities for controlling MPs through blackmail are unlimited. The Prime Minister of the day can discipline any MP with an awkward past—and how many people do not have the odd skeleton in the cupboard?—or smear both his own MPs and those of other parties.

Even more frightening for democrats is the potential control which security services can exert over politicians. If the security services hold data on politicians they can potentially blackmail any politician. What goes for politicians goes in principle for any person. Any person may be blackmailed, judges, policemen, mediafolk.

The sort of people security services monitor is often dubious in the extreme. Several years ago, a Liberal Democrat MP, Norman Baker received information which gave him reason to believe that MI5 had opened a file on him simply because of his involvement with a road protest group. He is still fighting to get MI5 to tell him whether they hold information on him.

The combination of state gathering of information and the use of the power of the state to both abuse individuals by threatening its public revelation and prevent those responsible for the abuse ever being brought to account in a court of law should frighten anyone.

The situation is worsening because of the burgeoning power of technology and the ever more authoritarian powers which Parliament is granting to the security services and the police generally.

Technology allows ever greater opportunity to gather, store and collate data, while laws such as the various terrorism Acts and the diminution of legal safeguards such as the breach of the right to silence and the proposed reduction in the scope of jury trials, will allow the state to do what they will with their citizens. Most worrying is the *Civil Contingencies Act*, which is with justice compared to Hitler's *Enabling Act* because it allows the government to do literally anything without debate, Parliamentary approval or regard to existing law by simply declaring an emergency, the circumstances of which are so loosely defined as to give an unscrupulous government *carte blanche* in deciding when and what an emergency is for the purposes of this law.

## THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION

Just as the security services have the opportunity to manipulate events in their own country for their own purposes, they potentially can do so abroad, especially if they are working in unison with a foreign security organisation. It is not implausible to imagine, say, MI6 and the CIA cooperating to advance the interests of each of their organisations or of individuals within the organisations, without any regard to the wishes of politicians or the interests of their respective countries.

## THE PECULIAR LEGAL POSITION OF THE SECURITY SERVICES

What can the British security and intelligence services legally do which is denied those outside the services? They are allowed to formally break the law without risk of prosecution provided they have official permission to do so. They may burgle your house. They may bug your phone. They may open your post. They may stalk you. They may keep data on you which they can make available to politicians and government agencies, whilst refusing to admit they hold such information if an individual makes a request under the *Data Protection Act* and the *Freedom of Information Act*.

In theory they can only do these things if proper official authorisation is given. But in the case of MI5 and MI6 there is no meaningful oversight of what they do.

A member of the security services is caught in a criminal act? The prosecution would not be in the public interest. Evidence held by the security services is wanted as evidence in a court case? It cannot be provided because it would compromise security. A security service member is called as a witness? Sorry, they either cannot appear or cannot be identified. You wish to discover whether data is held on you by the security service? MI5 and MI6 will claim the security exemption in the *Data Protection Act* and will not even tell you whether data is held. In short, they are a law unto themselves.

The public evidence is that if security agents do what the powers-that-be want, generally they can behave as they want without fear of exposure or prosecution because the decision as to whether to prosecute rests with the state. We know such prosecutions are effectively unknown from the simple fact of the absence of prosecutions where a person is charged with a crime committed whilst working for the state.

People who have done security work are prosecuted of course, but that is when they have broken the law on their own initiative and can be plausibly denied by the State.

"Most worrying is the *Civil Contingencies Bill*, which is with justice compared to Hitler's *Enabling Act*..."

## THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INTELLIGENCE

The obvious practical problems with intelligence work are who and what do you believe? Is there any way of being certain that an agent is not a double agent by design or necessity, having been caught and “turned”? And what is to stop a “turned” agent being “turned” again? We enter a world of mirrors in which all is reflected and nothing can be taken at its face value. That being so, what is the point of espionage?

The danger of infiltration by agents of the enemy is all too real. The experience of both British and US security services has been pretty dismal, stretching from the likes of Kim Philby in Britain to Ames in the US.

If the infiltrators are in a senior position they have immense opportunity to do harm, in betraying agents, in sabotaging actions and in promoting disinformation for their true masters. Soviet spies such as the traitors Philby, Burgess and Maclean were not foot soldiers but senior operatives within British Intelligence.

How much of security service time is wasted on surveillance of the security service’s own personnel? One would hope it would be considerable because who can trust whom? Our hope is almost certainly misplaced because we know of the many examples of senior figures in the British security services going undetected as spies for many years. More sinister, the existence of such people may be merely indicative of such widespread infiltration of British security that they have been (and perhaps still are) effectively controlled by the enemy.

## THE POLITICISATION OF INTELLIGENCE

All British Governments, including Blair’s, swear blind that political security judgements are made on the objective assessments of intelligence made by the various security services. To anyone familiar with the workings of government departments this will seem more than a little improbable. Here are the words of Peter Gardner, a one-time intelligence analyst working for the British government, in the *Daily Telegraph*, 30<sup>th</sup> June 2003:

*SIR - The Government is seeking to defend itself against the charge of exaggerating the threat posed by Saddam Hussein by presenting another myth as fact: that the Joint Intelligence Committee is the independent authority on intelligence. As anyone who has worked with that august body will know, this is far from the truth. It does not, as Tony Blair and Jack Straw want the public to believe, deal with raw intelligence. Neither does*

*it assess raw intelligence. This is the job of the analyst. Its primary role is to advise the Government on the implications of intelligence assessments and it is therefore a highly political body.*

*When I was writing assessments for the JIC it was not uncommon for pressure to be applied to me and other analysts to adjust our assessments to ensure they would be “better received.” By its very nature, especially when hard evidence is scarce, as seems to be the case with Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction, raw intelligence provides scope for flexibility in the assessment made of it. There is even wider scope for the implications of weak assessments to be influenced by presentation alone.*

*Such pressure is never in writing and never delivered directly. A representative of the Foreign Office, Downing Street or some other department calls and offers advice. With no audit trail, governments hope that they will not be caught out should the independence of JIC reports ever be questioned.*

*Any genuine inquiry into the use or abuse of intelligence should therefore address not only members of the JIC but also the analysts reporting to it. Do we have to rely on a reporter from the BBC to do that for us?*

As an ex-civil servant I can say that government generally works in this fashion when dealing with contentious matters, with politicians and civil servants “writing for the record”, i.e. putting what they want the official record to show. This is generally less than the full truth and not infrequently downright lies.

There has also developed in recent years a type of public behaviour which strongly suggests the security services are less than disinterested and apolitical agencies. No longer are Special Branch and MI5 locked in the shadows. They have public spokesmen, websites and information lines. This new found visibility has given politicians another opportunity to use security personnel to bolster their position. Hence, we find the head of MI5, Eliza Manningham-Buller, issuing a general and unsubstantiated warning (*Daily Telegraph*, 19<sup>th</sup> June 2003) that it was only a matter of time before terrorists obtain and use a “dirty bomb” to wreak mass devastation. This warning came when the Blair Government was in increasing trouble over the treatment of intelligence before the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. One would not have to be much of a cynic to think this was simply the head of MI5 acting on the orders of government as a smokescreen for the Government.

**“There has also developed in recent years a type of public behaviour which strongly suggests the security agencies are less than disinterested and apolitical agencies.”**

The events surrounding the Iraq invasion—especially the revelations of the Hutton Inquiry—should have killed once and for all any notion that intelligence is used honestly by politicians. Blair did not merely misrepresent or inflate data in the infamous “dossier”, he told a straightforward untruth for political purposes about Saddam Hussein’s supposed weapons of mass destruction being a direct, certain and immediate threat to British citizens. We know this because the Hutton Inquiry revealed that the actual intelligence was cautious, filled with caveats, inconclusive and, in the case of the “45 minutes” claim to launch WMD loaded missiles, referred only to battlefield capability not long distance delivery systems.

The behaviour of the then head of the Joint Intelligence Committee John Scarlett (a career intelligence officer) was also very revealing. Scarlett hid intelligence service doubts about Blair’s use of the data they were providing from Blair and the rest of the Cabinet. This is the classic behaviour of courtier towards the king, doing his duty by preventing the king from knowing what would be damaging for him to know and guaranteeing, in this case, Blair’s “deniability” should he be challenged over such intelligence dissent. Blair’s press officer, Alastair Campbell, provided further evidence of the incestuous relationship between Scarlett and 10 Downing Street by publicly describing Scarlett as “a mate”.

#### **THE SUCCESS OR FAILURE OF THE SECURITY SERVICES IS UNTESTABLE**

It is all very well saying that intelligence is testable against future events. It most certainly is. The trouble is that in all the really important cases one cannot wait for future events to show the accuracy or otherwise of the intelligence. With something such as the breaking of the codes for U-Boat movements, the test of future events is of use because, although false information may be given, the consequence of acting upon it was not and could not be national catastrophe. The worst that might happen was the loss of a convoy or two, which although terrible for those involved, was a blip in the great scheme of things that is a world war.

Can anyone remember any instance where intelligence or security work has averted a truly national disaster? By that I mean not a terrorist act such as the Omagh bombing but a war or an invasion? If you can, I would be interested to hear from you.

Of course, the security services will argue that the general public does not know about the successes because the war or disaster never happens. This form of argument is insupportable because it is untestable.

What we do know is that there are many instances

of intelligence failure or the failure of politicians to act on intelligence. The Falklands War is a classic example of the latter where the intelligence was correct but the politicians ignored it.

The best funded and most technological advanced security forces in the world, those of the USA, failed to predict the fall of the Soviet Union or prevent Pearl Harbour, Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait or the attacks in the USA itself on the 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001.

If the intelligence can never be certain and politicians will always be tempted to ignore unpleasant facts, it is so untrustworthy as to be useless at best and positively dangerous at worst.

It is also worthwhile pointing out that every now and then the security service is faced with the thing they fear most: information about their activities illicitly reaches the public fold, whether by internal leakage, a dirty trick by another security service, disaffected ex-employees or pure bad luck or carelessness—the amount of classified information thrown onto public waste tips or left on laptop computers or in briefcases which are subsequently lost sometimes seems to be enough to fill a library. As I write this, I have today’s London *Evening Standard*, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2004, revealing how details of the protection to be given the President of Pakistan during his forthcoming visit were found in a London street. Curiously, nothing dramatic ever seems to result from such breaches of security.

The other chronic problem for security services and politicians today is the sheer volume of data being obtained through electronic surveillance. There comes a point—long since past one imagines—when the volume of data becomes so overwhelming that it cannot be meaningfully studied or processed. That fact alone will mean that the intelligence wheat cannot be readily sorted from the chaff.

#### **WHAT IF THERE WERE NO SECURITY SERVICES?**

The best way to judge the worth and effectiveness of any activity is to ask what would happen if it did not exist. Imagine that MI5 and MI6 did not exist, what then? Our politicians would be forced to take proper responsibility for their actions because they would not be able to say that they were “relying on intelligence reports”. If there were no security services politicians would have to make decisions based on publicly known facts and use their common sense. This would concentrate political minds wonderfully and make rash or cowardly behaviour less common because there would be no one else to blame. Imagine, for example, that Blair had not been able to hide behind intelligence reports to justify our participation in the Iraq invasion. Would he have gone ahead if

**“Can anyone remember any instance where intelligence or security work has averted a truly national disaster?”**

he had to take the full responsibility? I doubt it because he would be reduced to saying either that we must go in simply to support the US or that his conscience told him it was the right thing to do, neither of which would have been politically acceptable. The intelligence reports gave him a fig leaf to cover his political nakedness.

The security services would not be able to feed false information to politicians. The opportunities for state gathering of data which could be used to blackmail people would be greatly reduced.

There are aspects of security work which are necessary. They are the police functions such as anti-terrorist work on the domestic front. These can be transferred to Special Branch over which there is, in theory at least, meaningful democratic supervision because they are part of the police.

#### **A SIMPLE WAY TO IMPROVE SECURITY WORK: GET RID OF GETTING “MR BIG”**

The police frequently excuse their failure to arrest people at the first opportunity on the grounds that they were “waiting for the suspect to lead them to the main player”. The security services use a similar line of justification, with a few pieces of additional ornament. The “Mr Big” line is probably the favourite for not arresting or prosecuting spies and even common criminals associated with them, but it has such fellows as “we did not wish to compromise a source/agent/operation” and “a prosecution would have endangered national security/national interests.”

The problem is that Mr Big is very rarely snared and when he is, another Mr Big soon takes his place. The other way of tackling Mr Big is to keep “killing” the footsoldiers by arresting and trying them. Mr Bigs cannot operate without bodies on the ground.

#### **WHAT THREAT COULD BRITAIN BE UNDER?**

The really radical question to ask is what foreign threat is Britain likely to face in the future? As things stand, there would appear to be no prospect of armed invasion provided we retain nuclear weapons.

There could plausibly be a trade embargo, for ex-

ample if Britain withdrew from the EU, and just conceivably a blockade, but the way for Britain to guard against such contingencies is to render herself capable of basic self-sufficiency in food, power, raw materials and manufacturing capacity.

If that is the case, what could foreign espionage organisations discover which would be a direct threat to British territory or interests? Apart from military information, the only potentially compromising data would relate to secret agreements between Britain and other nations or scandals involving British politicians which are not unearthed by our media. As secrecy is the bane of democracy any help in revealing them, foreign or otherwise, hostile or not, would be doing Britain a service.

It would be difficult to make an argument for even the protection of most military secrets if Britain restricted her armed forces simply to the task of defending the home territory, a policy adopted by most Western states. The whole point about defensive weapons is that you want the potential enemies to know that you have them.

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

There is no reason to believe that foreign government espionage could damage British interests, while the British security forces offer politicians a cast iron alibi for errors of judgement in foreign affairs and the justification for maintaining secrecy where openness should be the norm.

Judged by past performance, there is no evidence that security services anywhere have been successful in preventing any major military attack.

By their nature, the security services have an immense potential power for abuse, both through blackmail and the absence of any effective political control of them.

Security services are a threat to democratic politics and to the general freedom of any society. They are a conspiracy against the masses.

By permitting security services, we allow those with power to manipulate us without natural limit. We need to abolish the likes of MI5 and MI6 for our own protection.

**“Security services are a threat... to the general freedom of any society. They are a conspiracy against the masses”**



Libertarianism, conservatism, and tradition...

*Libertarians are not “against” tradition. But we make certain elementary distinctions. It is time conservatives... began doing likewise—starting with the distinction between the traditions that mankind has voluntarily generated and preserved, and those stemming from coercion, violence, and force. And it is time they stopped talking as if all the good and great traditions that are our rightful inheritance were somehow to be credited to the state, and to themselves as the state’s apologists, rather than to their true source—the women and men who, with what freedom they had, created, sifted, refined, and transmitted those traditions through the generations.*

Ralph Raico, ‘The Trouble With Conservatives’, *LewRockwell.com*, 1980/2004.

*“I will not be pushed, filed, stamped, indexed, briefed, debriefed, or numbered. My life is my own... I am not a number. I am a free man.”*

*Number 6 (played by Patrick McGoochan) in The Prisoner.*

The falsity of socialistic altruism...

*To suppose that the labourer of great capacity will content himself, in favour of the weak, with half his wages, furnish his services gratuitously, and produce, as the people say, for the king of Prussia—that is, for that abstraction called society, the sovereign, or my brothers—is to base society on a sentiment, I do not say beyond the reach of man, but one which, erected systematically into a principle, is only a false virtue, a dangerous hypocrisy.*

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *The Philosophy of Poverty*, 1847.



Is a new theocracy descending upon the USA?

*An Alabama lawmaker who sought to ban gay marriages now wants to ban novels with gay characters from public libraries, including university libraries. A bill by Rep. Gerald Allen [Republican representative for Cottondale] would prohibit the use of public funds for "the purchase of textbooks or library materials that recognize or promote homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle." Allen said he filed the bill to protect children from the "homosexual agenda."... Allen said that if his bill passes, novels with gay protagonists... would have to be removed from library shelves and destroyed. "[I guess we dig a big hole and dump them in and bury them]", he said.*

*A spokesman for the Montgomery-based Southern Poverty Law Center called the bill censorship. "It sounds like Nazi book burning to me", said SPLC spokesman Mark Potok.*

Kim Chandler, 'Gay book ban goal of state lawmaker', *The Birmingham News*, [www.al.com/news/birminghamnews](http://www.al.com/news/birminghamnews), 1<sup>st</sup> December 2004.

[Editor's note: The extent of the influence of this sort of "Evangelism" is open to debate. How much did George W. Bush owe his re-election to its adherents? In any event, it seems to be a growing influence, something that must be of concern to libertarian-inclined individuals and organisations such as the SIF. We have many problems in the West, but these are largely the result of socialism of one sort or another and a retreat to bigotry is certainly no solution.]

The younger generation sees through the EU...

*According to a survey by Britain's ICM polling institute, conducted for the European Foundation, 58 percent of Britons would like to see European Union treaties renegotiated, reducing them to simply trade and association agreements. The sentiment is even higher—68 percent—among those aged 18-24 years.*

Jan Jun, 'Euroskeptics in Britain heartened by results of New survey', *Radio Free Europe*, [www.rferl.org](http://www.rferl.org), 9<sup>th</sup> December 2004.

## THE HEALTHCARE "CRISIS" IN THE USA

Joe Peacott

*Editor's Note: The SIF is pleased to offer the first UK-based publication of this article by Joe Peacott. Mr Peacott is both a hard-line libertarian and has expert knowledge of the subject at hand. Although he is writing about the situation in the USA, virtually everything that he says can be applied to the UK as well. Of particular interest to the SIF with its motto "To promote responsible individual freedom" is how Mr Peacott notes that many are not prepared to accept "personal responsibility" when it comes to their health, believing instead in a "quick fix" at the taxpayers' expense.*



### INTRODUCTION

American politicians and news reporters frequently claim there is a health care crisis in the United States. While enormous, and steadily increasing, amounts of money are spent on medical care, research, so-called public health measures, and pharmaceuticals, people born in the United States continue to have a shorter life expectancy and higher chance of dying as infants than residents of a number of other countries that spend less money in these areas. This sorry state of affairs is generally attributed, at least in part, to the fact that a large number of people lack medical insurance. It is assumed that such people are completely priced out of the medical care market, and thereby denied access to essential medical services. This leads some to advocate one form or another of government-run medical care and/or insurance.

While Americans are less healthy than one would expect from the gross medical expenditures, the problem is more complex than one of lack of insurance and access to care. Most people in the United States have medical insurance, and a large number of those are served by one or another government-provided program, such as Medicaid, Medicare,<sup>1</sup> or a military-associated plan. For those without insurance, there are some physicians who do not take insurance and instead charge lower fees, as well as free or very inexpensive clinics located all over the country that provide at least basic primary care, and often comprehensive care for some medical conditions, charging people, when they charge at all, according to their income. Of course, some people fall totally outside any of these parts of the medical system, but they are few and far between. Even in these worst case scenarios, however, some combination of government intervention, charity care, and corporate free drug programs generally insures that people get taken care of and obtain the medica-

tions they need.

Clearly there are people who have a tough time obtaining and paying for health care services. But the fact that someone does not receive medical care, does not necessarily mean they lack "access" to it, as is presumed in many public health articles and reports. Just because someone cannot necessarily obtain the services they want at the time they want them and free does not mean that such services are inaccessible or that there are "barriers" to receiving care, any more than the fact that one has to pay for groceries, or that many stores close at night, presents a "barrier" to obtaining food, or makes food inaccessible. Many choose to spend what money they do have on things other than medical care, while relying on hospital emergency rooms when they get acutely ill. Others, who have or are eligible for either private or government insurance, simply choose not to obtain routine care in a timely fashion because they are more interested in doing other things with their time and, despite protestations to the contrary, don't see their health as more important than many other things in their lives. People play a key role in their own health, and the way they choose to interact with the medical care system greatly affects both the cost and the effectiveness of medical care.

### THE ROLE OF INDIVIDUAL CHOICE AND ACTION IN HEALTH MAINTENANCE

Although some diseases require specialized treatment and care and are difficult to prevent, many of the most common health problems people encounter are largely avoidable by prudent living and sensible choices in diet, activity, and recreation. And, to be fair, despite their largely pernicious effects on the medical care system, even government agencies do encourage people to make more healthful decisions in some areas of their lives. Living in ways that promote illness increases people's dependence on a flawed medical care system and makes this care more and more expensive. While the state can rightly be criticized for some of the shortcomings of the medical care system, bad choices on the part of regular people contribute greatly to the problem.

If people remain lean, exercise regularly, eat fatty animal foods in moderation (if at all), and avoid tobacco they are likely to be much healthier than they would otherwise be. And these methods of maintaining or restoring one's health are either inexpensive or would save people money. But

"Many choose to spend what money they do have on things other than medical care..."

exercising self-control and taking responsibility for the condition of one's own body interests far too few people, with around two thirds of Americans overweight or obese. Apparently they would prefer to eat too much and move too little and then turn to the medical system to fix the problems they have created for themselves.

Most deaths and much of the illness in the United States are a result of heart disease, strokes, cancer, and diabetes. Of these, it is likely that most strokes, heart attacks, and diabetes can be prevented by more healthy living. Modifying one's diet and exercising regularly will usually reduce blood pressure and cholesterol levels, both of which lead to heart attacks and strokes, and it is unusual for people who control their weight and are physically active to develop diabetes. In the case of cancer, the causes are often not yet clear, but diet appears to play a role in the development of at least some cancers, and the likely cause of many cases of the biggest killer, lung cancer, is not only known, but easily avoidable. One has only to not smoke or stop smoking to greatly reduce one's risk of this disease, as well as a number of others that are linked to tobacco use.

Many of the less common illnesses people experience are also preventable. This is true of HIV infection acquired through needle-sharing or risky sex, liver disease from excess alcohol intake or Hepatitis B or C infection (acquired via the same routes as HIV), or even the joint problems caused or exacerbated by obesity. Exercising care in our eating habits, physical activity, and sexual and recreational practices is key to preserving our health and increasing our years of healthy life.

Although much of people's ill health is a result of their own activities (or lack thereof), when people get sick they require treatment. But here, also, many people wish to avoid personal responsibility. Instead of seeking advice and increasing their knowledge of their disease in order to best treat it, they put themselves in the hands of a physician (or even a chiropractor) and ask or demand to be healed. Since so many practitioners enjoy playing god, this relationship can be comforting to both parties. But it does not make for good care, or restoration of health.

Presumably most medical practitioners counsel patients with new diagnoses of high blood pressure, or heart disease, or diabetes that altering their food intake and exercise habits are likely to improve their outcome, but the mainstay of treatment usually becomes medicine or surgery, since people whose bad habits have produced serious illness frequently remain unwilling to lose weight or work out, preferring what they see as a quick fix like cholesterol-lowering drugs or anti-diabetes medications to the hard work of taking better care of their bodies. And it is not unusual for people to get progressively sicker, adding on more and

more medicines, and then developing health problems from some of their drugs. In fact, for some, chronic illness becomes a sort of occupation which dominates their activities and conversation, and with which they become quite comfortable.

While it has become standard procedure to rely on sometimes harmful drugs and medical/surgical procedures instead of healthier practices to prevent or treat the diseases caused by unhealthy living, many illness-causing activities have themselves come to be considered diseases requiring "treatment" by medical specialists. Those who eat too much seek care from bariatric physicians, who treat the disease of obesity with drugs, surgery or a combination of both. Smoking cigarettes is considered an "addiction", and thus a disease to be treated with drugs and nicotine patches, on the model of heroin use or drinking too much. By turning bad habits into illnesses, people are again led to rely on the medical establishment instead of themselves, while helping fill the pockets of drug companies, hospitals, and physicians with money.

#### THE COSTS OF MEDICAL CARE

Even when people take good care of themselves and use the medical system wisely, medical care is expensive. The costs of office visits to doctors, surgery, medications, and insurance premiums all continue to rise. This is partly because research and development for medicines and devices is costly, but is also the result of monopoly/oligopoly conditions in the medical industries which allow practitioners, hospitals, and drug companies to charge higher prices than they would be able to in a truly competitive market.

Costs are increased by unwise use of these resources and medications, as well. Using emergency departments (EDs) for routine care, avoiding routine preventative consultations and testing, and patients' demands for medications even when they are either ineffective, unnecessary, or harmful, all contribute to making medical care more expensive than it should be. But consumers are not the only ones at fault in driving up medical costs and expenditures.

Drug companies spend a lot of money developing so-called "me too" drugs, like the "new purple pill", which do not really work better than older and cheaper drugs, but are patentable and therefore generate new profits for managers and owners, while providing little or no benefit to consumers. The prescription system in association with drug company advertising and widespread medical insurance coverage encourage excessive and inappropriate use of medications, which become increasingly expensive.

Medical providers have extended the range of

"... many people wish to avoid personal responsibility."

their practice way beyond the areas to which they once limited themselves. Physicians and other practitioners have a tendency to see themselves (and are often viewed by their clients) as not only healers, but as counselors and latter day priests, with social and spiritual “histories” now considered a routine part of a health assessment. Instead of simply being experts in helping us fix or maintain our bodies, doctors are now expected to repair people’s disordered lives. Something as vague as “frequent mental distress” is now a sign of poor mental health, and bad habits, bad moods, and even shyness are all redefined as diseases for which medications and therapy are prescribed. This vast expansion of what is considered medical care means more money spent and more resources consumed.

While physicians’ and hospitals’ roles in people’s lives have expanded, the expectations for the outcome of interactions with medical providers have changed, as well. If they do not get exactly what they want from a procedure or treatment, or if they have a bad outcome, regardless of the reason, people are all too willing to sue their doctor and/or health care institution. While doctors, nurses, and hospitals make mistakes and are surely at fault in some bad outcomes, lawsuits frequently target innocent providers. More litigation had led to increased, and sometimes prohibitive, prices for malpractice insurance. This has driven many providers out of certain lines of practice, like delivering babies, which increases prices by limiting the number of providers. And, in addition, those who remain in practice raise their fees even more to cover the increases in their insurance premiums.

#### PAYING FOR HEALTH CARE

Naturally, someone has to pay for all these medical consultations, diagnostic procedures, medications, and malpractice insurance payments. But a lot of people believe it should be someone other than themselves. Most people in this country have some form of health insurance, but usually feel they pay too much for it, no matter how much they use. Although newspaper reports on medical insurance bear headlines such as “Americans spend more on health care, get less”, subscribers want their insurance to cover more and more “treatments” like fat surgery, diet pills, and addiction therapy, but don’t want to cover the increased costs. Medical care, unlike true essentials such as food and housing, is seen as some sort of entitlement that should come free or cheaply to the consumer, no matter how costly it is to create and deliver. This attitude is summed up in the slogan, “health care is a right, not a privilege”, that is sometimes used by activists. It is assumed that people’s health is so important to them and so basic to their having a decent quality of life that they shouldn’t have to pay to maintain it.

However, the fact that so many do so little to maintain their health and prevent illness indicates that health is far less important to them than one is led to believe. Not only are most people unwilling to eat better and be more physically active, but people’s spending practices also indicate that many things take priority over health maintenance in many people’s lives. Although people complain about the high costs of medications and insurance and sometimes avoid routine medical and dental care to save money, they usually are able to buy that new sport utility vehicle (SUV),<sup>2</sup> have that second child, buy cell phones for all the kids, maintain a winter residence in Florida, or take those semi-annual trips to Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. Even those who are without health insurance and are assumed to be incapable of paying for even basic health maintenance services, generally manage to pay for their cable TV, car, pet food, and other non-necessary, but expensive, items. To paraphrase a speaker I once heard in Boston, people pay for what they want, but beg for what they need.

(It is of interest that the justification for buying an SUV is often that it is safer than a car, or that parents buy cell phones for the whole family on the assumption that this somehow makes them safer. But for some reason this concern with safety usually doesn’t lead people to work out more or eat less even though that would likely improve their health and make them safer from heart disease and diabetes. Besides, people are probably safer on buses than in either cars or SUVs, but most reject that option as well.)

Even basic health care or insurance premiums cost money, but the price of a yearly physical examination or dental hygiene visit is less than what many pay in monthly car loan and insurance payments. I worked for many years in a government hospital in Boston, Massachusetts, and daily took care of people who claimed they were unable to pay for even the cheapest treatments or medications, but could afford leather coats, automobiles, cell phones, or cigarettes. Right now in Anchorage, Alaska, a pack a day cigarette habit can cost a smoker \$180 (about £95) per month. Stopping smoking would not only make a smoker less likely to get sick with heart disease or cancer, but would free up \$2160 (about £1120) per year for medical and dental expenses.<sup>3</sup>

Since people have been convinced that they shouldn’t have to pay for their own medical care if they can avoid it, many have taken to using hospital emergency departments as walk-in clinics. Because government rules require that EDs provide at least a minimal amount of assessment and care to anyone who shows up there, regardless of ability (or willingness) to pay, people will go to an ED instead of a private doctor’s office because they know they will not have to pay the bill, even though an ED visit often entails a wait of several

“... spending practices also indicate that many things take priority over health maintenance in many people’s lives.”

hours for treatment. Similarly, people, including those who could easily afford to pay, will wait for hours to get free flu shots, even when they don't really need them. Although people are willing to spend money to save time in other circumstances, such as buying a car instead of riding the bus or train, when it comes to health care, avoiding paying often takes precedence over time and convenience.

But it is not just avoiding payment that draws people to hospital EDs. Poor health maintenance practices also contribute to the problem. Many people, including those with insurance, do not have primary physicians whom they can see when they become ill, so that when they develop a sickness, they are unable to see a practitioner in a timely fashion unless they use an ED or urgent care center of some sort. And for others, it is simply they want what they want when they want it, and since they are not paying, there is no disincentive to using the ED as their primary care center. Again, at the hospital at which I worked in Boston, all comers to the urgent care center were offered appointments (free to the uninsured) with a physician within a couple of months, but it was common for people not to keep their appointments and then show up again in the urgent care center or ED next time they had a health problem.

Inappropriate use of EDs is an expensive way to provide routine medical care, and use of EDs by people without emergency or truly urgent needs (or wants) makes it more difficult to deliver care to those who are experiencing true emergency health problems. When the cost of providing non-urgent care in this way is not borne by those who receive it, there is no disincentive to misuse of EDs and the problem is likely to continue.

Part of the reason that people are hesitant to pay for health care is that they perceive that physicians, hospital executives, and drug company stockholders are receiving excessive financial benefits from providing medical care to people who are much less well off economically. While this is true, it is no less true of those who own the car factories, restaurants, and cable TV companies, whose products and services poor and working people seem able to afford more easily than basic health care. But medical care, although arguably more important to the quality of people's lives, is apparently not important enough to pay for.

#### STATE CONTROL AND FUNDING OF MEDICAL CARE

The American medical care system is a mixed network of both government and non-government institutions and practitioners. But the drug manufacturers, insurance companies, practitioners, and hospitals that are not owned by the government

are so hemmed in and controlled by government laws, rules, and regulations that they can hardly be considered true "private" enterprises. Intervention by state and federal authorities in the provision and funding of medical care contributes to both the high costs and poor outcomes people experience in their dealings with medical providers.

The states license doctors, nurses, and other medical care providers, regulating their practice and restricting their numbers. They then outlaw provision of medical care by alternative practitioners and force those seeking assistance with their health to utilize only government-approved providers. As with any monopoly/oligopoly situation, prices and profits go up, the prestige of the service providers increases, the quality of service can suffer, and people's choices in providers and treatments are limited.

Government bureaucracies determine what drugs are available in the United States and whether or not they require a doctor's note (prescription) for purchase. People are thus denied access to a number of medicines which are safely in use in other countries, and are kept from freely using most of those that can be obtained legally here. They are forced to incur the expense of seeing a doctor if they wish to obtain a prescription drug even when they are knowledgeable enough to know it is the right treatment for them. And despite the fact that all these restrictions are in place allegedly to protect them, they still run the risk of taking government-approved drugs, like Vioxx and Baycol, that the manufacturers have known for years (but have not disclosed) can be dangerous.

While restrictions on access to pharmaceuticals has not served people well, the government's role in drug research and development has been even more problematic. Much of the study of potentially marketable drugs is initially financed by government agencies, but when drugs go on the commercial market, they are sold by private companies which have been issued patents allowing them to charge extortionate prices. The drug companies then argue that the vast profits they make on new medicines are justified by the high costs of developing these drugs, expenses which were, in fact, financed by taxes extorted from working people. People thus frequently pay twice for the medicines they buy.

Government programs in other health-related areas are open to criticism, as well. Largely taxpayer-funded universal vaccination of children for an ever-increasing number of infectious diseases (including Hepatitis B, of which the vast majority of children are at minimal risk) may well be contributing to the rising number of cases of autoimmune diseases like asthma and Crohn's disease, both of which are lifelong illnesses that are costly

**"Intervention by state and federal authorities... contributes to both the high costs and poor outcomes people experience..."**

to treat and cause much disability and even death. The federal government oversees and funds an Indian health "service" that is expensive, inefficient, and riddled with ethnic discrimination, creating medical facilities where people are segregated based on their ancestry. And its funding of research is often driven by politics, not science, with National Cancer Institute (NCI) research on breast and prostate cancer funded much more generously than research on lung cancer, which is responsible for twice as many deaths each year as the other two cancers combined.

In the area of medical insurance, government plays a dual role. It not only regulates the "private" portion of the industry, but it also provides a significant amount of health insurance directly, through Medicare, Medicaid, and the military medical care systems. State governments set prices that allow private company owners and executives to prosper while customers pay through the nose, putting the interests of company stockholders above those of the people who purchase policies. These insurance companies then do their best to avoid paying claims whenever they can get away with it, further increasing profits.

Government insurance programs, which many believe should be expanded to fix the present crisis, are no prize either. Medicare still leaves many old and/or disabled people with significant bills to pay, either for supplemental "private" insurance policies, or for pricey co-pays. In addition, Medicare "reform" has resulted in payments to providers caring for Medicare clients that are sometimes too low to cover their costs, leading a number of practitioners to either stop providing some services to Medicare clients, or drop them as customers altogether. Medicaid coverage, while providing better reimbursement in general, is difficult or impossible for many in need to obtain. And while government insurance leaves much to be desired, the bureaucracies charged with administering it are so incompetent that states have been forced to return some of the funds they have received from the Feds to provide health insurance for poor children, because they were too inefficient to spend it all on those who needed it. And of course, government insurance, like that provided by private companies, will not pay for services provided by unlicensed practitioners or for medications not prescribed by them.

An essential part of all these specific ways in which government interferes with, and often sabotages, medical care delivery is the requirement for reams of paperwork from every individual and institution involved in providing medical care. Whether it is periodic re-licensure of providers, the regular inspections and re-inspections of hospitals and clinics by the Joint Commission for the Accreditation of Health Care Organiza-

tions (JCAHO), or filing and re-filing of Medicare and Medicaid claims, enormous amounts of resources, time, and effort are consumed with bureaucratic reporting requirements and documentation of compliance with the often arbitrary standards of JCAHO or other government-authorized or mandated overseers.

The rationale for all of this interference, all these rules, regulations, and requirements is, of course, that we are not capable of adequately taking care of ourselves, and that we need the government to choose our medical care providers and insurers and then protect us from their ill intentions and/or greed. Of course many people take poor care of themselves, and many providers and institutions are not to be trusted, but the government, through its licensing/certification programs and the prescription system has in large part created both problems. By empowering government-approved experts and institutions to control and restrict access to treatments and medications, it encourages people to rely on experts, instead of themselves, to manage and maintain their health. And then, like any monopoly or oligopoly, the state-sanctioned providers, protected from competition, have little incentive to contain costs or treat their customers respectfully. While bureaucrats and the providers and corporations they license and protect may talk of patient-centered care, their unwillingness to allow people to choose their providers and treatments for themselves, shows what they really believe: that we need to be taken care of by the beneficent government.

### ONE WAY OUT OF THIS MESS

Despite its dismal record in overseeing medical care in the United States, many still look to government to fix the problems that it is largely responsible for creating. Advocates of this approach generally regard the medical systems in Europe or Canada as models of how medical care should be managed and provided, but they often fail to acknowledge the problems with these systems, from long waiting lists for procedures and surgery, to lower wages for health care workers, to inadequate and disrespectful care in hospitals. Additionally, countries that provide universal medical care also have higher taxes than does the United States. It is far from clear that a national health care system would be cheaper for most Americans or maintain a level of quality and efficiency comparable to what people now experience and expect. Given the politicians' and bureaucrats' sorry performance in running the present medical system, granting the state even more power to manage our health is unlikely to provide the solution to the current "crisis".

Instead, the anarchist approach of getting rid of government entirely, in all its meddling forms, is the only means of providing an environment in

**"The rationale for all of this interference is... that we are not capable of adequately taking care of ourselves..."**

which free people would be able to address their health and medical needs and wants in whatever way suits them. The barriers to practitioners providing services and people obtaining drugs and treatments would disappear, allowing people new, real choices in their medical care and making it genuinely patient-centered.

Although the increased supply of providers and availability of remedies would result in a drop in costs and prices, medical care in an anarchist society would still have a price tag. Producing drugs, performing surgery, and testing blood specimens all require time and money. While voluntary mutual insurance programs and charities would be formed by interested people to assist in cases of extraordinary expense, just as happened commonly before the welfare state, people would still have to make decisions about how and where to spend their money or exchange their goods and give priority to some needs and wants over others. Buying insurance or putting aside savings for unforeseen medical needs would be just as prudent in a free society as it is now.

Other social and economic changes in an anarchist society would also affect people's ability to improve their health and purchase medical care. Individuals' wealth would increase, and hours of work decrease, since a large portion of the value of what they produce will no longer be stolen from them by governments and employers. They would then have the opportunity to dedicate more of their money and time to maintaining or improving their health.

Just because they will be better able both to purchase medical services and to take care of themselves, there is no guarantee that people will make wiser decisions about their health or medical care in an anarchist future than they do today. Getting rid of the true barriers to access to medical services that the state creates and maintains would allow interested and motivated people the opportunity to take control of their medical care and

their health. But unless individuals make a commitment to healthful living, chronic preventable illnesses will continue to burden people both physically and financially.

Anarchy will not make everyone healthy, wealthy, or wise. It will simply allow everyone the freedom to live their lives in whatever peaceful way they choose. It will then be up to each individual to decide for themselves if their health really is important to them.

## NOTES

(1) "*Medicare* is an insurance program. Medical bills are paid from trust funds which those covered have paid into. It serves people over 65 primarily, whatever their income; and serves younger disabled people and dialysis patients. Patients pay part of costs through deductibles for hospital and other costs. Small monthly premiums are required for non-hospital coverage... *Medicaid* is an assistance program. Medical bills are paid from federal, state and local tax funds. It serves low-income people of every age. Patients usually pay no part of costs for covered medical expenses."

(2) SUVs are the sort of large, nominally off-road vehicles that can often now be seen in the UK's suburbs.

(3) Given the additional taxation on tobacco products that there is in the UK, this yearly figure for "a pack a day cigarette habit" could easily reach £1700.



*Joe Peacott is an individualist anarchist and professional nurse currently living and working in Alaska, USA. His website can be found at <http://world.std.com/~bbrigade/>. For a more detailed account of how free market medical care might operate, see his article, 'Health Care Without Government', that appeared in the October 2002 issue of *The Individual*.*

**"It will be up to each individual to decide for themselves if their health really is important to them."**



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**[The SIF]... is an organisation that supports individual liberty in all matters... subject only to the equal liberty of others."**

(...continued from the front page)

called members. Despite our frequent attempts to make it clear what the SIF stands for—i.e. “classical liberalism”—it is obvious from *some* of the correspondence that we receive that we still have a number of members who cannot or will not accept this.

I will not go into detail but—simply taking the most extreme recent example—when we discover that so-called members of the SIF are actively promoting racist and socialist organisations such as the British National Party then they will be expelled.

The SIF does not insist on “doctrinal purity” from its members let alone from contributors of articles to this journal. All that we ask is that when they present themselves within the forum that the SIF provides then what they say *is* reasonably compatible with the SIF’s views.

So, to say it *yet again*... The Society for Individual Freedom is an organisation that supports individual liberty in all matters—economic and personal—subject only to the equal liberty of others.

Or, as the great if misunderstood Victorian libertarian Herbert Spencer put it when formulating his “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”. (And women, of course!)

To borrow from a well-known TV advert: “The Society for Individual Freedom: It does what it says on the tin”.



Finally, I must apologise for the continuing non-appearance of the minutes from the SIF’s 2004 AGM held last October. Sudden calls on the personal time of the relevant SIF personnel have held things up a bit. Never fear, we’ll get there in the end! In the meantime, I am pleased to report that this issue *does* contain Mike Plumbe’s 2004 ‘Chairman’s Report’ which provides an overview of the SIF’s recent activities.

*Nigel Meek*



And Tony Blair and the EU may be as dust before the breath of Providence...

*So we are at the very beginning of human history; 50,000 years is but the blink of an eye compared to the billions of years still to come. We really have come a long way in the last two thousand years. When, in a more mundane way, I worry about what Tony Blair is doing to this country or what horrors the European Union is perpetrating, I have again to remind myself that Providence is watching over it all and will ensure the best possible outcome for our eternal souls in the long run—the very long run.*

Guy de Moubray, ‘An Introduction to Swedenborg’ (part 2), *Things Heard & Seen* (the newsletter of the Swedenborg Society ([www.swedenborg.org.uk](http://www.swedenborg.org.uk))), Autumn 2004, No. 15, pp. 58-61.

## THE CASE FOR MORE LAWS

Peter H. Curry

Is it not high time that someone came to the rescue of Freedom? Everywhere it is being determinedly trampled into the ground. Our rulers seem to see all freedom as immoral, forgetting that true morality promotes rather than destroys it, and seem to consider it negligent to allow freedom, or anything that looks like it, to stand unmolested. They make laws against anything that is, or can be imagined to be, the slightest bit wrong. The urgent question arises: *What is to be done about this grievous situation?* So far no one has had much success in that direction. If only it were possible to invoke a little freedom erosion technique, and slap a preservation order on freedom. Such an order might be worded like this:

*Any politician, or person in power, who suggests a new law, or any increase in draconianity of any existing law, or a new tax, or any increase in existing taxation, must either sweep roads, or sell matches and shoelaces on street corners from that moment onwards; and must be sure to earn enough to keep himself; and the four strong men with big whips who see to it that he works hard for at least twenty five hours a day, and who do not accept the fact that there are only twenty four hours in a day as providing an acceptable excuse for ever taking an hour off, any more than they would accept dropping dead as furnishing sufficient reason for ever giving up work.*

An ardent freedom lover would soon spot one serious failing to such a law: it should have been made at least sixty years ago. That is unfortunate, because most freedom lovers abhor retrospective legislation, understandably so, because demolishing freedom in the present and future is plenty bad enough without trying to do so in the past as well. Would it be too dangerous to make an exception in the case of a freedom preservation law? At least the roads might be cleaner, and matches and shoelaces more readily available.

When I was nine, I remember having a good cry—and I have been grieving ever since—when my mother told me about just a few of the oppressive laws that were then in existence. So many things were against the law! It seemed as if one had to get someone's permission, or pay for a licence, before doing anything that was significant or exciting, such as earning money. I did not seriously consider suicide at the time, because I believed that by the time I was a man, all heart-breaking laws would be thrown out. People

would have come to realise the iniquitousness and stupidity of them. What a hope! I am now in my seventies, and it is becoming more and more obvious that the mid-1930s were free and easy times compared with the present. To say that we are now grotesquely over-governed would be a monumental understatement.

A possible alternative freedom preservation law comes to mind:

*Any policeman or exponent of law and order, or what passes thereas, who dares to enforce, or attempt to enforce, any law or regulation made after 1935, must be sent away for processing, disposed of after dark, or something equally drastic.*

Freedom erosion of the more distressing and infuriating kind always originates in lawless lawmaking. Restoring freedom by making lawmaking laws might prove easier than trying to get laws rescinded. The first law of lawmaking should be: *Leave well alone!* On no account interfere with those who are not doing any serious harm, and certainly not with those who are doing good and constructive things. We could start by declaring charity bazaars, car boot sales, club functions, any sort of DIY activity, and much else, as strictly off-limits to any kind of official interference, except such as might be desirable for keeping the peace and promoting honesty and fairness. Most laws need counter-laws to render them null and void insofar as they are needlessly oppressive or obstructive. There is little virtue in dreaming up excuses for punishing people for the sake of it, or creating "offences" where none worth mentioning previously existed. Laws, like the people who make them, sometimes need discipline. Good laws are discovered in the course of genuinely seeking to promote happiness and good, rather than made to satisfy the needs of politicians mainly interested in power, prestige, and in justifying their existence and that of their agents. Joe Public likes to have power and prestige too, as well as valid existence reasons, and should not have them stolen away by the unscrupulous. People want to be allowed to live their lives without being threatened with fines, imprisonment or other unpleasanties, at every turn.

All those who favour, make, or enforce oppressive, heartbreaking, unjust, unproductive, degrading or generally hard to tolerate laws, should, along with the Bureaucrats of Brussels—whoever they may be: in Brussels they blame the bureaucrats of London, but blameworthiness seems to

**"To say that we are now grossly over-governed would be a monumental understatement."**

be agreed upon—and their ilk be rounded up and herded into special high-Belsenity concentration camps called Happiness Control Centres, where everything in life that gives the slightest bit of pleasure, including such things as eating and drinking, is either forbidden altogether, or so tied up with red tape that one suffers heartbreak at the very thought of it. Happiness Control Centres are run on two main guiding principles: (1) *Those who do not believe in freedom need not have it*, and (2) *Those who believe in punishment must be allowed to have it without stint*. The internees are allowed a modicum of mercy while having their happiness controlled. For instance, they might be allowed three long drinks a week and two good meals a month while standing in the pillory or wrist stocks, or when stretched on special frames with water constantly dripping on carefully selected parts of their bodies (to symbolise the plight of freedom lovers, kept in a state of anxiety while freedom is ratiocinated away bit by bit). Neither is freedom completely absent in Happiness Control Centres, because there are no restrictions on pining, languishing and perishing; and suffering, especially the sort that arises from frustration and exasperation, is not only permitted, but actively encouraged; and the Happiness Controllers go to extraordinary lengths to ensure that it is always done properly.

There are many, probably a majority, who, not without reason, suspect that the whole country, even the world, is becoming more and more like a Happiness Control Centre, except that the guiding principles are different: (1) *Those who believe in freedom must be strenuously denied it*, and (2) *Those who do not believe in punishment must never be without it*. The politicians unwittingly (it is to be hoped) act as the Happiness Controllers.

The twin tyrants of safety and hygiene are invoked to justify so much petty tyranny that it is time Joe Public woke up and thought seriously about getting both of them made illegal. They may be beneficial in moderation, but they are highly objectionable in strict *immoderation*. If only governments could be made to be as fanatical about upholding freedom as they currently are about pushing safety and hygiene; the trend towards totalitarianism might be reversed, whereupon it might be truly said that democracy works.

Some weeks ago, I bought two long strips of 6" x 1" melamine covered chipboard. I wanted them cut to facilitate getting them into the car. Only one man, clothed from head to foot in protective gear, was allowed to do it at the DIY Centre where I bought them. He donned protective gloves, and pulled down the visor of his protective helmet, just to make a 6" cut with the safest of guided power saws. When I remarked on it, I was told "It is the law". At that same DIY store, I found that most of the tools, even simple hand tools like pliers and hammers, carried fussy little labels exhorting the users to wear protective gog-

gles, and take goodness-knows-what precautions when using them. Why this wholesale slaughter of enthusiasm and spontaneity? If it is normally thought commendable to die for freedom, why should it be considered somewhat naughty to take almost non-existent risks for the sake of speed and efficiency?

If one does not consider that a sufficiently blatant example of maddening and barely tolerable law-making, consider what is happening to the Women's Institute: that worthy voluntary organisation, with an excellent cleanliness record, that, for the love of doing good, provides refreshments and help at bazaars and other functions. They are now required by law to waste time and money going to take silly and sometimes insulting courses and tests before they can operate legally. Moreover, the certificates they must obtain have to be renewed every three years; and as if that is not enough, anyone who helps them must suffer similar hindrances and humiliation. The result is that the WI is now threatened with extinction (*Daily Mail*, 15<sup>th</sup> November 2004, p. 34). Also, those industrious and good people who make cakes for sales of work, and parents who provide homemade cakes and such-like at school speech days etc., are threatened with similar tyranny. Why this total murder of kindness and goodwill? Those who think it is right that good-doers—as opposed to do-gooders: there is a big difference!—should be harried and persecuted to such an extent, deserve to be hanged drawn and quartered eight times a day for ninety four years, by which time, it is to be hoped, someone will have dreamed up a sufficient punishment! If encouraging good is the best way to counteract evil, one can imagine the probable consequences of fiercely discouraging good. People will soon be turning to crime because they are not allowed to do much else. If, before being made available to the general public, all medicines have to be rigorously tested for unwanted side effects, why should not all legislation be subjected to similar treatment?

We might do well to make the most of what freedom we still have. When we think that there is no more freedom left to take away, we can be sure that the killjoys will find some. Freedom is like health. We are not aware that we ever had it until we have lost it. Major freedom demolition jobs are in the pipeline. The EU wants more interference with DIY enthusiasts; and the monster of compulsory identity cards is rearing its ugly head. It was bad enough during the war, when compulsory identity cards were introduced as a temporary measure; but there are certain nitwits would like to make them a permanent feature of our everyday lives. If they were to pass a law requiring all persons over the age of five to wear manacles and leg irons, at least there would be a reduced risk of getting into trouble through losing them, or leaving them at home! Why require everyone to carry ID cards, when most of us carry our fingerprints,

**"When we think that there is no more freedom left to take away we can be sure that the killjoys will find some."**

DNA and irises around with us everywhere as a matter of course? The answer is that that does not satisfy the power hungry. Nowadays, it is a simple matter to record half a person's life history on a square inch or two of plastic. We may all soon be forced to make our darkest secrets available to those with whom we would least like to share them. It is claimed that the measure is being introduced to reduce crime, but what about the monstrous crime of saddling everyone with the worry and encumbrance of these abominable cards? It would clearly be paving the way for a new and particularly nasty form of total totalitari-

anism. They may start in an apparently innocent and excusable way, but once they get the thin edge in, *watch out!*



*Peter Curry's great-grandfather founded the well-known high-street electrical retailers Currys Limited, now part of the Dixons Group. Peter himself joined the SIF during the early 1960s making him one of the SIF's longest-standing members (although we have at least one member who joined during the Second World War).*

## SIF CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR 2004 GIVEN AT THE SIF AGM ON THE 27<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2004

**Michael Plumbe**

### MEETINGS WITH SPEAKERS

I have already reported on the talk after the AGM last October when Stuart Millson spoke on 'Banana Republic Britain: Blair's Legacy to Public Services and Traditional Liberty'. He spoke worryingly on how involvement in the EU is affecting our daily life, usually adversely.

Since then we have had three excellent meetings. In February Nigel Meek gave an erudite but accessible talk on his innovative method of mapping the ideology of the Conservative Party and the general public. This he rounded off with the electoral implications for libertarianism. Then in May Kevin Cahill, Editor of Global & Western News and a former researcher in the House of Commons (for a while working for Paddy Ashdown), gave us some intriguing glimpses of what really happens behind-the-scenes in and around Parliament. Next in July we were privileged to hear Sonya Porter, a fervent member of UKIP, giving us the low-down on some more of the horrors coming out of the EU. She covered such matters as Regionalisation, *Corpus Juris*, European Arrest Warrant and Europol. Finally, tonight we have Professor David Myddelton. His talk will be mentioned next year.

By courtesy of Lord Monson, a luncheon was arranged in the House of Lords in March. We invited as our speaker the distinguished author Russell Lewis, following the publication of his latest book *Race Warriors*. His interesting talk was followed by a lively discussion. We were pleased that so many members and their guests were able to attend.

We are most grateful to all our speakers and to Nigel Meek for the good publicity material he has

generated for each event.

### CAMPAIGNS AND PROJECTS

**Tell-It:** Again there is little for us to report specifically this year although we have maintained a "watching brief". Peter Jackson has reported separately on this topic.

**Internet:** Our webmaster Howard Hammond-Edgar and Nigel Meek have looked after our site. The style has been upgraded as Howard is now also webmaster of the Campaign Against Censorship and he wanted to improve our website in a way which matches theirs. The number of "hits" is perhaps a little disappointing but nevertheless there is often a surge of interest when an issue of *The Individual* is loaded. Also we do get the occasional new member through the Internet. We thank Howard and Nigel for their efforts here.

**Research into Censorship:** Once again we have had neither the time nor the resources to pursue this idea yet. Once again I include the matter here so that it does not get forgotten.

**Anti-Hunting Bill:** Let me report a small adventure of mine when, (unofficially) wearing my SIF hat, I took part in the demonstration outside Parliament when the Anti-Hunting Bill was being debated. It was a pleasure to be amongst such a (generally) good-natured crowd of "middle-English" protesters. I hold no brief for blood sports; indeed I think the pursuit of animals for pleasure is rather bizarre. However I feel strongly that there are far worse abuses of animal rights which should be tackled long before an age-old country way of life is attacked. In any case, what about fishing and shooting? Surely they are equally obnoxious. I was quite near the Police

"By courtesy of Lord Monson, a luncheon was arranged in the House of Lords..."

group which rained blows on a small section of the crowd. It was frightening to be there and to watch. Some young men did indeed act in a provocative way but I believe the Police over-reacted in restraining the crowd as they did. Later the mass hysteria which greeted the announcement that protesters had reached the floor of the House was most exhilarating. I have not felt such excitement since I was on the Poll Tax march and we went past the entrance to Downing Street.

**Civil Contingencies Bill:** There is much activity on the Internet with people pointing out the shortcomings of this Bill and its threats to liberty. As usual the bill is being rushed through without proper scrutiny or evaluation of its effect on our daily lives. Some of it is to my mind positively Orwellian in its (deliberate, I say) curtailment of our rights. We have not as a Society been able to handle any proper study of what is happening. If any member would like to take up this matter, please do let us know.

### THE INDIVIDUAL

To me the most important continuing activity of a Society such as ours is the regular publication of a magazine. How Nigel Meek manages to put together so much good material so regularly is little short of a miracle. He combines the functions of Editor, Publisher and Contributor with excellent results. May we also record our thanks to the Producer and Distributor, Robert Stevens, who can be relied on to ensure timely issuance, and to the several proof-readers who help behind-the-scenes.

May I note here that Roger Gale MP has quoted in Parliament from Robert Henderson's article 'The Right to Self-Defence' which appeared in the February 2003 issue of *The Individual*.

### CHOICE IN PERSONAL SAFETY (CIPS)

We are pleased to report continued harmonious relations with CIPS under the arrangements made a year or so ago. Don Furness, CIPS Chairman, regularly makes the effort to attend our meetings even though this is quite a trek for him. His own meetings have not been too well attended although we wish to record the interest and support provided to CIPS by Dr Barry Bracewell-Milnes.

Perhaps I can repeat the request made last year for someone to assist with the storage and cataloguing of a large and valuable archive of mainly statistical material accumulated by the late Gordon Read. So much of the CIPS campaign against compulsion is based on statistics that we do not want to lose what Gordon has been at such pains to collect.

### REPRESENTATION ON CAMPAIGN FOR FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

CFoI has not continued the regular meetings it used to organise but CFoI has been very active dealing with, and offering training on, the imminent Freedom of Information Act. Michael Champness and Robert Henderson have been monitoring what has been happening and have helpfully reported to us as necessary.

### OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

With a small, widely-scattered committee it is always difficult to get committee meetings organised. So the idea of having such meetings immediately before our main meetings seems to be the best compromise even if we do sometimes have to curtail our discussion when "the public" appear. It is therefore much appreciated that both the Officers and the Ordinary members of the committee make considerable efforts to attend. Lucy Ryder continues to handle our financial affairs and keeps us in order here. Jenny Wakley and Peter Jackson, with help when needed from Rhoda Zeffertt, look after the administration. Nigel Meek, in addition to his onerous duties on *The Individual* and the website, manages to run the Membership Records. Others who contribute usefully to the proceedings as and when they can are Paul Anderton, Dr Barry Bracewell-Milnes and David Wedgwood. Barry also remains Chairman of the National Council although he has several times indicated his wish to stand down from this post. In the background for help when needed are Martin Ball and Cynthia Campbell-Savours

Lord Monson is as usual a source of great support. In spite of the many demands on his time he always manages to come for at least part of every meeting.

One member has again provided a substantial donation towards our work. This has been most useful especially in funding regular publication of *The Individual*. We thank him gratefully.

### THE FUTURE

Is bleak. We need more activists. Any offers?



"I was quite near the police group which rained blows on a small section of the crowd. It was frightening to be there and to watch."

## Society for Individual Freedom

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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 liberty of the individual, subject only to the equal liberty of others.**

### **The SIF promotes...**

- ✓ The liberty, 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**