

In this issue:

- Tell-IT campaign update and other SIF business.
- Some thoughts on the nature of the SIF.
- Britain under Mr Blair.
- The importance of free speech.

WHAT THE SIF STANDS FOR

I must begin by pre-emptively apologising to any members of the SIF that take objection to my own essay in this issue, 'The Society for Individual Freedom: Quintessentially Libertarian (or at least Libertarian-Conservative...)'.

It is emphatically not my wish to insult members who feel uneasy with terms such as 'libertarian' or 'classical liberal' but instead look upon themselves as out-and-out 'conservatives'. There is in any case a great deal of overlap between them all, both in the positive sense of what they agree upon and in the negative sense of a critique of our present Establishment.

However, at the moment there seem to be any number of 'traditionalist' or 'patriotic' organisations and publications of a decidedly socially and/or economically collectivist and interventionist inclination. Instead, the Society for Individual Freedom is... a society to promote individual freedom—albeit one that does not confuse 'responsible individual freedom' with 'damn you' narcissism. Aside from my personal libertarian views, as editor of this journal I regard it as my duty to take the SIF at its word.

We live in a world where the spirit of the individual—a concept which we in the English-speaking world have a particular place of honour in nurturing—is more and more assailed by the forces of collectivism and resembles ever more closely "a world increasingly weighed down by sterile

bureaucracies" as the folks at *The Cunningham Amendment* so aptly put it. If an organisation called the 'Society for Individual Freedom' does not stand foursquare against this assault, then we can expect few others to do so.

In any event, the essay is purely my own view and not that of the SIF. Oh, and by the way, when *Peter Simple* is good, he's *very* good!

Meanwhile, this issue also contains essays by Stuart Millson and Robert Henderson that highlight the importance of individual freedom and the way in which it is being eroded in Britain today. With that in mind, the notice about the Campaign Against Censorship is a pleasing coincidence.

This issue also features letters from SIF members that have appeared in *The Times*. There will be more on the remarkable Dr Lefever in the next issue of this journal.

Thanks to a number of people, but in particular our webmaster, Howard Hammond-Edgar, the design and content of our website goes from strength to strength. Most recently, a new section on the Choice in Personal Safety campaign has been added.

With best wishes for 2004...

Nigel Meek

DISCLAIMER & PUBLISHING DETAILS

Views expressed in *The Individual* are not necessarily those of the Editor or the SIF and its members, but are presented as a contribution to debate.

Only policies or opinions that have been approved by the SIF Management Committee, and are noted as such, can be taken as having formal SIF approval. This also applies to editorial comments in this journal.

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THE SOCIETY FOR INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM: QUINTESSENTIALLY LIBERTARIAN (OR AT LEAST LIBERTARIAN-CONSERVATIVE...)

Nigel Meek

Based upon *some* of the SIF's recent public speakers, and upon *some* of those attending such meetings, and even *some* of the articles that have appeared in issues of this journal—for which I, as the editor, must take recent responsibility—the SIF has evidently come to be seen by many as a 'conservative' organisation. This is true, but only in a highly qualified sense.

I recently came across a book that mentions the SIF and helps to place it within its proper ideological, institutional, and historical context. Volume two of W.H. Greenleaf's fascinating work, *The British Political Tradition*,¹ looks in turn at the three main ideological traditions in modern Britain from the 19th century onwards: liberalism, conservatism, and socialism. To summarise, his main thesis about Conservatism—i.e. pertaining to the Conservative Party in this case—is that it has a twin inheritance of collectivism and individualism (p. 189), or if you prefer Tory and Neo-Liberal (p. 192).

Looking first at the collectivist strand (pp. 196-262), Greenleaf notes that from the 19th century onwards many Conservatives advocated wide-scale interventionism—consciously and publicly rejecting *laissez-faire*—to confront what they perceived to be the failings of a newly industrialised, capitalist society. They often did this out of a mixture of religious duty and semi-feudal noblesse oblige. This tradition, whilst rejecting outright socialism—accepting that there were limits on what the State could do and thus seeking a 'middle way' between socialism and *laissez-faire*—carried on into the 20th century and was particularly reinforced by the First World War, the Depression, and the Second World War.

However, Greenleaf goes on to note that individualism and support for *laissez-faire*—i.e. a 'libertarian' strand, a term that he specifically uses (p. 263)—also has a long history within the Conservative Party (pp. 263-308). Indeed, inasmuch as it existed at all within mainstream British politics, by the end of the 19th century supporters and opponents alike were more likely to associate it with the Conservative Party than with an increasingly illiberal Liberal Party. Throughout the late 19th and early to mid 20th centuries various anti-collectivist groups sprang up such as the Liberty & Property Defence League and our own Society for Individual Freedom. Although such individu-

alist groups were usually formally independent of all political parties, they were nearly always most closely *associated* with the Conservative Party. However, despite their efforts, by the time of the 1945 general election it was clear that the collectivist and paternalist tradition had become dominant, particularly amongst the Conservative Party's leadership.

Turning back to Greenleaf's comments about the SIF, he spends some time discussing the importance to individualist thinking in the first half of the 20th century of Sir Ernest Benn (pp. 295-308). Shortly after the publication in 1942 of a *Manifesto of British Liberty*, Benn helped to found the SIF. This drew its support from those from all parties but included a number of Conservative MPs formerly prominent in the National League of Freedom (pp. 300-301). The SIF launched a news-



**Sir Ernest Benn
(1875-1954)**

letter called *Freedom First* that at one time had a circulation of about 20,000 (p. 301)—a figure, alas, rather higher than that of *The Individual* today...

Greenleaf continues his historical review by noting that, despite some distinguished exceptions, the post-Second World War Conservative Party was clearly initially dominated by the collectivist tradition. However, influenced somewhat by writers such as Friedrich Hayek and organisations such as the Institute of Economic Affairs, there began a revival—of sorts—of libertarianism within the Party. This had gained ground in the Party by the late 1960s and, after a false start during the Heath government of 1970-1974, became an important element within at least the Conservative's economic thinking under Margaret Thatcher (pp. 308-345).

The SIF's place within the British political tradition is therefore clear. It is (i) a libertarian, classical liberal, individualist—call it what you will—'pressure group' that is (ii) formally independent of all political parties and seeks the support from any who share to some reasonable degree its aims and beliefs, but which (iii) in practice has tended to be closer to the Conservative Party simply be-

"Throughout the late 19th and early to mid 20th centuries various anti-collectivist groups sprang up such as the ... Society for Individual Freedom."

cause for over a century now—inasmuch as it has had a place at all within mainstream British politics—libertarianism has been more closely associated with the Conservative Party. (Although there are of course many libertarians associated with other political parties or none at all and most members of the Conservative Party could not and cannot be considered libertarians by any stretch of the imagination.) Moreover, although it ought to go without saying, it should be added that (iv) the SIF is not an open-forum debating society.

Which brings me to restate the SIF's beliefs. I make no apology for reproducing within the body of *The Individual* the formal—last amended and approved on the 10th July 2002—list of the aims and beliefs of the SIF that can be found *prominently featured* on the back cover of this journal, on the SIF's website, and on the membership application form. They are:

- That the individual, rather than the State, is the primary source of morality and authority.
- That private citizens should have the freedom to act as they wish provided their actions do not harm others, and that the law should exist principally to guarantee such individual liberty and not to act as a paternalistic guardian; in the primacy of freely negotiated contract; and in Parliament as the supreme law-making body in the United Kingdom.
- That an efficient free-market economy benefits all, and that the State's economic function should mainly be limited to the prevention of violence and fraud and similar obstacles to honest competition and co-operation.
- That taxes in the United Kingdom are far too high and erode individual responsibility and enterprise; and that in a truly free society citizens, with the benefit of higher post-tax earnings, would be free to decide upon their own priorities, with usually temporary government assistance concentrated upon cases of unavoidable hardship.
- That justice shall be administered by courts that are not subject to political pressure; and that government decisions have no validity unless founded on clear legal authority.
- That to preserve the liberties of private individuals we need more independent-minded Members of Parliament, a stronger Second Chamber, and more effective parliamentary control over the executive.
- That there is too much influence on government from pressure groups that call for legislation of an unnecessary and restrictive nature, thus not only adding to the material burdens on individuals and corporate bodies but reducing one's capacity to learn personal responsibility, self-reliance, and voluntary co-operation.

Although not 'anarcho-capitalist', arguably in ab-

solute terms and certainly relative to the current political situation this represents a resolutely libertarian manifesto. It does so by stating its belief in individual liberty in economic and personal matters largely constrained only by the equal liberty of others and the mechanisms required to ensure this—which in the absence of mankind achieving a state of grace and sagacity that is sadly unlikely, means laws, the means of deciding and enforcing them, and institutional arrangements within which disputes can be discussed and settled.

The SIF's agenda is far from a nostalgic yearning for a *Peter Simple*-like² 'Merrie England' conservatism that looks back to a fictitious 'green and pleasant land'—complete with contented yokels doffing their caps to their ruddy-faced, benevolent squire—before its 'ruination' by the coming of the steam engine and capitalism and its latter-day 'moral corruption' by the evils of McDonalds and rock 'n' roll. (Needless to say, its agenda also contains no support at all for those wishing to force the consumption of McDonalds and rock 'n' roll onto others.)

And at the risk of sounding shockingly 'politically correct', its individualistic message also implicitly—but, I would strongly argue, necessarily—stands foursquare against the inherently collectivist 'isms' of racism and sexism. Similarly, it should also regard consensual adult sexual relations in private—whether heterosexual, homosexual, or whatever—as a matter wholly for the participants providing that they take the consequences—the SIF's motto is not for nothing "To promote responsible individual freedom".

Whilst it would be unfair to expect many members of the SIF to know much about the history of the SIF—even more so of the SIF's 19th century classical liberal pre-history—its libertarian aims and beliefs are both prominently and unambiguously stated.

And yet...

Although he is clearly an opponent of the SIF's general aims, and furthermore appears to cherry-pick worst-case examples, nevertheless in his interesting monograph *The Bigger Tory Vote*³—one has to say it quickly to appreciate the play on words—Nick Toczek makes a plausible case that, certainly from the mid-1960s onwards, the SIF has entertained figures of a 'far Right' persuasion (pp. 10-17) who possess little sympathy for classical liberalism as a whole.

Toczek also notes that the SIF has occasionally been gripped by bouts of political monomania (p. 13). This is worrying since it can blind those so afflicted to the truth about any new-found 'allies'. This has a contemporary importance regarding the question of Britain's relationship with—and even membership of—the European Union. An-

"[The SIF's]...
libertarian aims
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ecdotaly—and I can only go on that proportion of SIF members that I talk to or correspond with—many members of the SIF might be described as ‘Euro-sceptic’. As a paid-up member of—for example—the Campaign for an Independent Britain, I wish to see Britain withdraw from the EU. I have my own reasons for doing so.^{4,5} However, as I have argued at greater length elsewhere,⁶ it is very dangerous to just be *against* something without keeping a firm grip on *what one wants instead and why*. Sadly, personal experience indicates that far too many of the most hardline anti-EUers—from a variety of positions, so I need not be too specific—adhere to views largely or wholly incompatible with the aims and beliefs of the SIF.

The front cover of *The Individual* carries a disclaimer that says in part, “Views expressed in *The Individual* are not necessarily those of the Editor or the SIF and its members, but are presented as a contribution to debate. Only policies or opinions that have been approved by the SIF Management Committee, and are noted as such, can be taken as having formal SIF approval...”

Keeping in mind that this disclaimer applies no less to *this* essay as anything else, but having a regard to the SIF’s history and pre-history and noting again that the aims and beliefs set out above and elsewhere *have* been formally approved, let me reiterate that the SIF is a libertarian-inclined organisation—libertarian-conservative if you prefer—and is emphatically *not* a ‘Right-wing’ organisation that seeks to promote—whether explicitly or implicitly—a socially or economically authoritarian or collectivist agenda. I’m afraid that anyone who thinks otherwise is wrong!

“The Society for Individual Freedom is a libertarian-inclined organisation...”

Herbert Spencer
(1820-1903)



Notes

- (1) W.H. Greenleaf, *The British Political Tradition, Volume 2: The Ideological Heritage*, London, Routledge, 1983.
- (2) Michael Wharton, *Peter Simple’s Domain*, London, New European Publications, 2003.
- (3) Nick Toczek, *The Bigger Tory Vote: The Covert Sequestration of the Bigotry Vote* (2nd ed.), Stirling, AK Press, 1992.
- (4) Nigel Meek, ‘Any Colour So Long As It’s Black: The EU’s Concept of ‘Free Markets’ As Defined by One of its Leading British Representatives’, *Free Life*, No. 33, August 1999, p. 9.
- (5) Nigel Meek, ‘The Nature Of Christian Democracy: A Review and Critique of Dr Maurice Glasman’s *Unnecessary Suffering: Managing Market Utopia*’, *The Individual*, May 2002, pp. 6-10.
- (6) Nigel Meek, *Libertarian Alliances: Who Libertarians Should and Should Not Consort With, and the Need to both Rank and Rate Them*, London, Libertarian Alliance, 2000.



Nigel Meek is the Editorial Director and Membership Director of both the Libertarian Alliance and the Society for Individual Freedom.

On the Need to Reaffirm Western Values...

“Western Civilization must gain the moral backbone and self-confidence to claim ethical legitimacy in support of individualism... before it can successfully confront the irrationalism and injustice that produces criminal governments.”

From Jack Gardner, ‘Moral War on Religious Dogma Needed’, *Sense of Life Objectivists* website, http://solohq.com/Articles/Gardner/Moral_War_on_Religious_Dogma_Needed.shtml, September 2003.

BANANA REPUBLIC BRITAIN: BLAIR'S LEGACY TO PUBLIC SERVICES AND TRADITIONAL LIBERTY

Stuart Millson

Editor's Note: The following is the text of a speech delivered by Mr Millson to the SIF on Wednesday 8th October 2003, at the Westminster Arms, Storey's Gate, London SW1.



It gives me great pleasure to be able to speak to you this evening, and I wish to thank Michael Plumbe and the Society for its extremely kind invitation.

I am not sure whether, in the future, events such as these will need to be licensed by the Ministry of Truth, or whether the application will have to go through the appropriate European Union authority. But for now, let us at least give thanks that we can still meet in relative freedom, and express our opinions.

Tonight, I would like to talk about how our traditional liberties are being eroded—by a Government fixated on the rights, not of our own citizens, but of those of Iraq or Sierra Leone; a Government which cares nothing for our constitution and the failing health of our faltering democracy. And make no mistake, ladies and gentlemen: we are also being betrayed by a so-called Opposition, dedicated to such important things as “NHS patients’ passports”, the cones hotline, and the wearing of fancy dress. I refer here to the Tory Party Chairman’s belief in the importance of leopard-skin shoes, and the Shadow Home Secretary’s apparent conviction that community problems can be solved by grinning like Tony Blair, or appearing like an extra from *Carry On Up the Khyber*.

But seriously... Increasingly, our society is losing its free speech and freedoms. The Government wishes us all to be stamped and barcoded; with a centralised records office holding our personal details and even our DNA. Our movements, from the cradle to the grave, will be monitored by the brave, new Welfare/Surveillance State which our paranoid and regulation-minded rulers have designed for us. With crime at an all-time high, and illegal immigration rushing like flood water around the desks of the Department of Paper Shuffling (otherwise known as the Home Office), one wonders if the right identity cards will be sent to the right people, or even whether the Government can hope to tackle the insurmountable problems it has helped to create.

I doubt if a glorified bus pass (with a National Insurance number on it) will help! Instead, it will merely allow the Government to keep tabs on the rest of us—the uncomplaining, easily-pushed-around majority. I have yet to read J.G. Ballard’s novel about a violent middle-class revolution of the near-future, but perhaps we may all find ourselves sucked into it instead.

The European Union, once described by Christopher Booker as “the most insane system of government ever devised”, stands like a backdrop to this liberty-destroying process. Like the fiery mountains of Mordor casting an ever-growing darkness and shadow across the land, the EU stands poised to crush freedom, and national and individual dignity. Nations and parliaments will dissolve—EU-appointed, regional rubber-stamping bodies will take their place. Race commissars, equality commissars, human rights commissars, Europol—plus every busybody who is able to hold a clipboard, will be out to make us good, obedient Euro-citizens. Political parties (soon to be funded and no doubt approved by the state) will have to satisfy the EU’s “anti-xenophobia” requirement. If you are a Euro-sceptic party, prepare to go to the EU gulag.

Already, your freedom to grow food, to fish the sea, to run your butcher’s shop, to run your vegetable stall is curtailed by order of the EU. Catch a species of fish which is not on your quota approval form, and you will be fined and put out of business. Sell someone a pound of this, or a pound of that, and you will find yourself plunged into a nightmare of litigation, prosecution and pedantic, nasty, robotic officialdom. Few in politics will be able to help you. After all, the three “main” parties all believe that our place is within the corrupt, obsessive, neurotic and self-important European Union, with opponents of the EU derided as if they were lunatics—a truly dangerous development.

We should certainly not mock the idea of “thought crimes”—or of a free people suddenly being subjected to a frightening *Nineteen Eighty-Four* scenario. Ten years ago, I wrote a piece for the much-respected quarterly magazine, *This England*—an article which criticised the idea of a multicultural society being imposed upon the ancient English nation. I sought to warn readers that unless something could be done to halt this proc-

“The Government wishes us all to be stamped and barcoded...”

ess, our country would cease to be recognisable. Agree or disagree with my argument, I hope we all believe that I have the right to express it. I returned to this theme in other editions, but I greatly upset the *Guardian* writer and self-appointed cultural historian, Patrick Wright.

In one Saturday edition of the freedom-loving '*Grauniad*', Mr Wright informed his readers that the leftist *Searchlight* magazine had tried to apply pressure upon W.H. Smith—one of *This England's* distributors—to remove the magazine from its shelves. And because I had written on the issue of multiculturalism and immigration—something which I believe should be debated by all, whatever their ethnic background—Wright stated: "...we can only ask why the DPP has not taken action." Could anything be more indicative of how traditional British freedoms are being replaced by ideological decrees and witch-hunts? A mirror image of the totalitarianism he claims to be against, Mr Wright's position is truly worrying.

But it's not just the 'big things'—such as the EU, or Mr Wright's belief that people who disagree with him should be locked up. Recently, walking through the countryside near my home (or at least, the segment of the countryside not yet turned into a superstore by John Prescott) I found myself in a favourite quiet lane. Along the verge and by the hedgerows—horror of horrors—were signs, erected by the local authority, which said: "*QUIET LANE!*" I wondered if I would come across a noticeboard telling me that I was walking beneath a tree, or whether a council-approved vending machine or cashpoint had been placed in the ragstone wall—for the "convenience of the citizen".

It is difficult to remain composed when discussing "local authorities"! Once a symbol of municipal pride, quietly getting on (no doubt in a "quiet lane") with day-to-day duties, "the council" as it then was, has become a mini-government. Officials—all on substantial salaries—have a policy and a department for everything. Try to ring them, to solve a problem, or to get things done, and a flat, dry voice tells you: "no, we can't do that", or "your call may be monitored for training purposes". Dare to be late with your council tax (i.e. your compulsory contribution to a commissar's salary, or the Chief Executive's index-linked pension) and a stern letter will come winging its way to you. Thanks, dear local authority—it's nice to know that we, your paymasters, are so valued.

Over-regulated, grossly over-taxed, pushed about, controlled, bossed, lectured—the citizens of the Queen (herself a "citizen of the European Union" thanks to that nice Mr Major) are in chains. If you want to escape to the countryside, you find yourself in an officially-regulated "quiet lane", or "recreation resource". If you want to speak to a

"customer services operator" you are recorded and categorised. If you have to defend your home, family and possessions from crime, it is likely that you will find yourself in a cell—answerable to the very criminal who has attacked you. It's nice to know that your council tax, which finances the police, is put to such good use.

There is now a sense of simmering discontent in Britain. But still we remain too passive, too easily discouraged from doing anything to change things in our "banana republic". We put up with cancelled rail services—an estimated 15 million minutes of delayed trains each year; we put up with the ever-growing NHS waiting list—despite Mr Blair's famous declaration in 1997: "we will restore the National Health Service as the pride of the nation." We pay millions of pounds in taxes, national and local, yet still the infrastructure and appearance of the country seems run-down and tatty. Just where is our money going? No doubt it is being wisely spent, topping up the pension schemes of council officials, or helping to relieve the Kinnocks' restaurant expenses in Brussels.

Like a spluttering engine on its last legs—in fact, like something from the nightmare that was Connex South Eastern—the public sector, and indeed large chunks of the deregulated sector, seem to be breaking down. But the ever-spinning Government remains optimistic. Surely our minds will be diverted from these serious problems by that smiling, guitar-twanging "straight kinda guy" in No. 10, or by Cherie giving us a chorus of *When I'm 64*—a sensitive touch, especially just after the suicide of Dr David Kelly. And there's always *Pop Idol* or Beckham's latest haircut to remind us of the important things in life.

Ladies and gentlemen. Our forefathers fought for basic freedoms. Many lives were given so that free speech and a more or less settled society could exist on this island. Today, discord, depressions, stress - a sense that we can't turn to anyone, and that no-one cares, exists as never before. Organisations such as the Society for Individual Freedom do a valuable job in keeping the flame of individual freedom alive. Long may your work continue.



Stuart Millson is a politics graduate from Essex University. He has written for a number of publications, most notably This England, The Salisbury Review, and Right Now!



"There is now a sense of simmering discontent in Britain. But still we remain too passive..."

The EU *versus* small businesses... and humane farming

SIF member, contributor to *The Individual*, and businessman Jim Mackie (www.jamesmackie.com) had the following letter printed in *The Times* on the 6th November 2003...

'Turkey disease'

Sir, The drug Emtryl is not the only treatment for blackhead, the fatal liver disease, in turkeys (report and leading article, October 28).

Three companies, including my own, are working together on non-pharmaceutical products to improve fish and animal health, including control of blackhead. We have found that, by increasing the nutritional input of the diet at crucial periods in production, we reduce the stress on livestock, thus making them able to resist parasite and disease challenges.

These products have been available in Europe for almost two years. However, EU legislation is forcing many animal health products off the market across Europe because small companies like mine cannot afford the cost of registering them. For example, the fee to lodge an application for any animal medicine in the UK is £25,000, never mind the exorbitant costs that research centres charge to collect simple data.

Although human medicines can cross European borders, animal medicines have to be registered in each country. So much for free trade.

Yours,

James A. Mackie



“... EU legislation is forcing many animal health products off the market across Europe because small companies... cannot afford the cost of registering them.”



Practical anti-sexism...

“More than 1 million girls in Afghanistan have entered schools since the fall of the hard-line Taliban regime—which had forbidden the education of girls—according to a UNICEF survey issued last week.”

Betsy Pisik, *The U.N. Report*, 6th October 2003; copied via Chuck Muth's *News & Views*, www.chuckmuth.com, 10th October 2003.

Before...



After...



“More than 1 million girls in Afghanistan have entered schools since the fall of the hard-line Taliban regime...”



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AN APPEAL FROM THE MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY!

Nigel Meek

My Lords, Ladies, and Gentlemen...

If you are an Ordinary member of the SIF and pay by cheque, will you please ensure that sometime during 2004 you do so. The minimum annual subscription is £15 although some 'members' have been paying absolutely nothing for quite a while... If you would like to start paying by standing order, please contact us at the address on the back cover and we will be happy to give you the necessary information.



A depiction of your membership secretary and editor wondering if he can afford the price of a second-class stamp...

If you are an Ordinary member of the SIF and already pay by standing order, will you please ensure that you have instructed your bank to pay a minimum of £15 per year. A number of members are still paying only £12 or £10, and some are paying even less...

(The mechanism for those who are SIF members via their Choice in Personal Safety membership is different. Your subscriptions are collected in the first instance by CIPS who then pass half of it onto the SIF itself.)

In recent years—for a number of reasons—the SIF has taken a very 'gentlemanly' approach to the collection of subscriptions, operating a *de facto*—although certainly not a *de jure*—'honour system'. Although the SIF is financially 'in the black', aside from the constitutional implications this is a practice that we cannot maintain indefinitely.

Some 'leading lights' of the SIF—in truth a very small number of people—spend a great deal of time and effort and indeed often their own money on Society activities. These include: the Tell-IT and CIPS campaigns; organising the production of, and writing articles for, *The Individual*; keeping the website up-to-date; membership

of and liaison with other organisations; and arranging SIF meetings, speakers, and luncheons. It is little to ask that for their part other members of the SIF renew their subscriptions on time and in full.

Thank you.

"It is little to ask that... members of the SIF renew their subscriptions on time and in full."

THE TELL-IT CAMPAIGN: AN UPDATE

Peter Jackson

Editor's Note: The following is the text of a report delivered by Mr Jackson to the SIF's 2003 AGM on Wednesday 8th October 2003, at the Westminster Arms, Storey's Gate, London SW1.



Tell-IT stands for the SIF Campaign to 'tell' and make widely available the information on the long-term effects of drugs and treatments. This means: firstly, for the medical profession as they only have fragments of what is needed; and secondly for the public who have a touching faith that the medical profession do have this information. Making such information widely available in society is part of the SIF's support for Freedom of Information (FOI).

A previous report told some of the astonishing

story of Epic, Dr Alan Dean's company.¹ Epic has been collecting data from GPs for the General Practise Research Database (GPRD), the source of the raw data that we are hoping can be mined for the information we want. In a court case between Epic and the Department of Health (DoH) the DoH were found to be in breach of contract by not giving the data to Epic. An out-of-court settlement stated that the DoH had to pay damages to Epic and supply them with the data that they had withheld. Surprisingly, the DoH did not comply with supplying this data and preferred to pay damages each quarter

Now that Epic is no longer under the thumb of the DoH, they are now in a remarkable position where they have been collecting data from GPs for a new and much improved database. They have made other important technical advances

"The aim of Epic is to give researchers very cheap information on which to work."

such as collecting the data electronically. They are able to piggyback on the Health-net, which is a secure means of passing data. But whereas the NHS passes data on the Health-net which includes the names and addresses of patients, Epic has the data depersonalised before it is sent. This gives unrivalled protection in respect of the privacy of the individuals involved.

The aim of Epic is to give researchers very cheap information on which to work. Of course this fits in exceedingly well with the aims of Tell-IT.

Fortunately, drug companies will pay most of Epic's costs by taking the information that they use in order to put their products on the market. This means that academic licensees will get their information cheaply, which is exactly what is needed for them to produce the part of the infor-

mation that Tell-IT is seeking.

Although Epic recognises that Tell-IT helped to bring about a change in Government policy, perhaps for now Tell-IT should remain on the back burner and simply help Epic with unostentatious moral support.

Notes

(1) Peter Jackson, 'The Tell-It Campaign: An Interim Report', *The Individual*, No. 31, May 2002, pp. 11-12.



Besides his involvement in the Tell-IT campaign, Peter Jackson is joint Hon. Secretary of the SIF.

Antidepressants and the welfare state *versus* personal responsibility

SIF member, contributor to *The Individual*, private health practitioner, and recipient of the Libertarian Alliance's 2003 'Liberty in Action' award Dr Robert Lefever (www.promis.co.uk) had the following letter printed in *The Times* on the 27th October 2003...

'Antidepressant pills'

Sir, It is already too late to enforce a crackdown on antidepressants given out "like sweets" (report, early editions, October 20).

GPs will justify prescribing for specific need and patients will continue to believe that they need medicinal help. The causes of this *folie à deux* lie in the general absence of human psychology in medical education, and in the welfare state instilling the belief that personal problems can be resolved through medicines or other external interventions.

Sincerely,

Robert Lefever



ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST CENSORSHIP

Given the SIF's commitment to freedom of information, it is unsurprising that there is considerable overlap between the SIF and the CAC at a senior level.

The editorial director and membership secretary of the SIF—Nigel Meek—is a member of the CAC's executive committee, and the two organisations have the same webmaster—Howard Hammond-Edgar. Both the chairman and the secretary of the CAC—Ted Goodman and Mary Hayward—have contributed articles to *The Individual* and/or given talks to the SIF.

This, then, is simply by way of promoting a very worthy organisation.



The Guiding Principles of the CAC

1. The right to obtain and impart knowledge.
2. Freedom from censorship.
3. Freedom for creative artists to present their perceptions, interpretations, and ideas.
4. Support for victims of censorship without discrimination on the grounds of sex, sexual orientation, race, politics, or religion.

Further Polices Guiding the Work of the CAC

1. Vigilance in defence of the freedoms of information and expression requires continued monitoring of attacks on and restrictions of those freedoms, and of the effects of new technology on the control of information gathering, so that the public may be made aware of any dangers that may ensue.
2. Individual or group privacy should not be

used as a weapon in defence of censorship or to restrict free access to information.

3. Reaction to any threat or restriction must be positive and expressed in simple, comprehensible terms.
4. The CAC is and should remain independent of all political parties.
5. Collaboration with individuals and organisations in Britain and elsewhere pursuing similar purposes should be pursued where appropriate.
6. The problem of access to material by children is different from that of access by adults. The principles listed above apply to adults.

Contacting the CAC

All enquiries and correspondence should be addressed to:

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Joining the CAC

If you support the work of the CAC and would like to join, then please write to the address above. The minimum annual subscription is £5 or £2.50 for students, senior citizens, or the unwaged.



Politics is...

"Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it whether it exists or not, diagnosing it incorrectly, and applying the wrong remedy."

Sir Ernest Benn (1875-1954), one of the founders of the Society for Individual Freedom

"... there is considerable overlap between the SIF and the CAC..."

STRANGLING FREEDOM

Robert Henderson

The Importance of Free Speech

“And though all the winds of doctrine were let loose upon the earth, so truth be in the field [and] we do injuriously by licensing and prohibiting to misdoubt her strength. Let her and falsehood grapple; who ever knew truth put to the worse, in a free and open encounter.” [Milton, *Areopagitica*].

Milton’s words perhaps contain more significance than he realised, for a society only becomes wholeheartedly tyrannical when censorship allows no effective opposition. To take a most dramatic instance, if the Nazis had been forced by frequently expressed contrary public opinion to explain their policy of genocide to the German people, it is highly improbable that the whole grisly business would have been mooted, for we know that even without any serious public opposition the Nazis went to considerable lengths, in the midst of a most tremendous war, to persuade the mass of Germans that Jews were simply being resettled or, at worst, used as forced labour.

But although free expression is a golden prize, it is also one of the hardest things for men (of all political stamps) to practise, there being a profound temptation for anyone to engage in the self-serving delusion that the suppression of contrary opinion is not an abrogation of free expression but the legitimate exclusion of dangerous ideas. Milton himself fell prey to this temptation once his political “side” gained the ascendancy during the Commonwealth and Protectorate.

The idea that free expression can exist whilst restrictions on what may be said are in force is a literal nonsense because free expression is indivisible. Its essence is that it is not a negotiable quality; you either have it or a range of permitted opinion which may be altered at any point by the ruling elite, the mass media, unelected pressure groups, terrorists, and the Mob.

Britain a Free Country?

It is often claimed—never more frequently than at present by our political elite—that Britain is a free country where a man may say what he wants. This has always been less than the truth and a surprising number of laws restricting free speech exist.

In Britain, it is presently circumscribed by the laws relating to libel, slander, confidence, blasphemy, obscenity, official secrets, equal opportunities, and race/ethnic relations. Government

departments and agencies, local municipalities, private corporate bodies, and private citizens may also obtain injunctions to prevent both the expression of views and physical demonstrations. In addition, the police have practically unlimited powers to prevent a man speaking if it is judged that the words uttered are “likely to cause a breach of the peace” and may limit public demonstrations virtually at will.

To these barriers is added the voluntary code of practice which is policed by the Press Complaints Commission. This contains such widely drawn and imprecise restrictions as:

“The Press should avoid prejudicial or pejorative references to a person’s race, colour, religion, sex or sexual orientation or to any physical or mental illness or handicap.”

and

“It should avoid publishing details of a person’s race, colour, religion, sex or sexual orientation, unless these are directly relevant to the story.”

Nor is free expression guaranteed more securely by international treaty. The 1951 European Convention on Human Rights states in Article 10 (now incorporated directly into English law in the Human Rights Act) that:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers.”

All fine and dandy. But this is followed by:

“The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health *or morals* [my emphasis], for the protection of the reputation of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.”

Which caveats allow any state to do virtually anything by way of censorship.

“... a society only becomes wholeheartedly tyrannical when censorship allows no effective opposition.”

The Restraints of Custom and Ideology

But perhaps more potent than formal laws and treaties—for they are unlimited and cannot be challenged in the courts—are the restraints imposed by custom and ideology.

Although we have never had freedom of expression, for most of the past century and a half the range of permitted opinion has been broad and the restrictions on what might be said have had more of a social content than a political one. Fifty years ago bad language and mention of matters such as illegitimacy and homosexuality were considered to be impolite, but the idea that whole areas of political discourse should be ruled out of public discussion was alien to the British.

In the past half century, the range of what is not acceptable in “polite” company has shifted very much to the political. Gradually what has become known as political correctness (pc) has restricted

public discourse on a large swathe of centrally important political questions to very narrow limits. Most particularly, anyone in public life or in the public eye, knows that it is death to their careers if not worse, to fail to pay at least lip service to the credo of the unholy trinity of political correctness: race, gay rights and sexual equality. To this “Trinity” may be added the minor non-pc sins of opposing any attempt to make society “safer” by passing laws which are sinister in their effects and generally unenforceable or the advocacy of any idea which is not ostensibly directed towards the end of an undefined general equality.

But it is not only those that have a degree of celebrity or enhanced status within the public realm who need fear. Political correctness is by its nature totalitarian—the only acceptable view on any pc subject being the pc one—and all must heed its demands. Hence, all public employees, no matter how humble, must not only endure the humiliation of race awareness courses and sexual equality seminars, but live in fear of demotion at best and dismissal at worst if they are deemed to have shown non-pc behaviour or displayed non-pc thoughts. What applies to public service is mimicked increasingly by private businesses, especially the larger ones.

It is not that a person need be racist, homophobic or misogynist in any meaningful sense known to past generations to incur the wrath of the pc police. The politically correct have reduced the definition of what it is to be racist, homophobic and misogynist to such a narrow condition that any human being is in danger of falling foul of those who would cry bigot in the enthusiastic manner

of the competing sides in the Reformation who cried heretic. Express a preference for one culture or nation over another and the speaker is racist. Let a pub landlord dare to mention that he prefers to employ good-looking girls as barmaids, and he is sexist. Mention that the legal approval of sexual acts by Gays in public lavatories might not be in the public interest and wait to be called homophobic. Ironically, many members of the “protected” groups see that such behaviour is not to their advantage because it is both unreasonable in itself and likely to inflame prejudice against them. However, they have great difficulty in speaking out because not only do they face the usual abuse directed at anyone who stands against political correctness, but also attack from the most fanatical of activists from within their own minority group for being in effect uncle Toms.



“I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.”

Voltaire (1694-1778)

Revolutions notoriously devour their own. Just as the religious in the time of the Reformation had to go to ever greater extremes to prove their orthodoxy, so do the practitioners of political correctness become ever more extreme,

some from a desire to be the most advanced and others from a fear of having their “soundness” questioned if they remain behind the ideological leaders.

The “Right” Sort of Discrimination

The obnoxious contraction of what is permitted has a further danger for the unwary. Although the dictates of political correctness are in theory universal, in practice they are applied with vastly greater enthusiasm against certain groups than others. A year or so ago, a television presenter Anne Robinson made what was obviously a joke about the Welsh on a programme entitled *Room 101*. The idea of the programme was for those appearing to consign something or someone to *Room 101*, the place in George Orwell’s *1984* where “the most terrible thing in the world happens”. Anne Robinson consigned the Welsh with the comment “What are they for?”. A day or so after the programme she became the subject of a police investigation for inciting racial hatred and a file was sent to the Crown Prosecution Service. Some weeks after it was quietly announced that she would not be prosecuted.

Compare that eager police response with that after the current director-general of the BBC, Greg Dyke who in 2001 described a meeting of BBC managers as “hideously white” (*Sunday Telegraph*, 7 January 2001).

As the law stands, the statement is unambiguously racist because Mr Dyke is making a claim about a recognised racial group and the use of the word

“Although the dictates of political correctness are in theory universal, in practice they are applied with vastly greater enthusiasm against certain groups than others.”

“hideously” is highly inflammatory. The extremely unpleasant nature of it can be seen by substituting black or Asian for white: “hideously black”, “hideously Asian”. Its effect can only be to incite racial hatred against whites. The severity of the offence is greatly magnified by Mr Dyke’s position as the head of our state funded broadcaster.

To test the pc water I made a complaint to the Metropolitan police. They refused to act, despite the fact that Dyke’s comment was not a joke and his public position is a very important one. I tested the Metropolitan police a second time shortly afterwards with a complaint against a Welsh Nationalist politician called John Elfed Jones who had charmingly described the English who moved into Wales as a “disease” and likened them to foot and mouth (*Daily Telegraph*, 8 August 2001, ‘English are like foot and mouth in Wales’). Mr Jones is a man of some public standing in Wales. He is a former chief of HTV and Welsh Water, has held office in the Welsh Language Society and was involved in the creation of the Welsh Assembly. He is a member of Plaid Cymru. Thus, his remarks have more than ordinary public significance.

Again, the police refused to act, despite the fact that Jones’ political position gave his words considerable significance in a part of the UK where firebomb attacks on the homes of English settlers are part of the political landscape. From the refusal to act in these two strong cases of clear racial incitement, it is reasonable to conclude that only the “right” type of racial incitement complaint is acceptable to the police. Complaints to the Commission for Racial Equality on the Dyke and Jones cases met with a similar refusal to act.

This form of oppressive and partial behaviour by the police is growing. On 9 November 2003 Cheshire Police acted with the greatest haste on a complaint from “a member of the public” after the Bishop of Chester, Dr Peter Forster, suggested that homosexuals seek psychiatric help to reorientate their sexuality.

A day or so later (11 November 2003), they were forced to announce that Dr Forster had committed no offence—as any sane person knew—because the 1986 Public Order Act does not cover “hate crimes” based on sexuality. However, the Chief Constable of the force, Peter Fahy, expressed regret at Dr Forster’s comments and said that it was the duty of everyone in an influential position to celebrate diversity, viz: “We need to be very aware of the position of minorities in the county and make sure diversity is celebrated. Vulnerable minorities should feel they are protected.”

The obvious response to that statement is since when have the police had political comment as part of their brief? The answer appears to be that

from now on virtually anything goes. Nor does it need a particular crime to provoke such comment. Here is Chief superintendent Paul Pearce of the Sussex force speaking in 2003:

“Recent events in the police service have highlighted the continual need for a positive anti-racist and anti-discrimination stance.” “Sussex Police is overtly hostile to those who discriminate on the grounds of race, religion, skin colour, sexual orientation, disability, gender, social class or any other inappropriate factor”. (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/southern_counties/3228833.stm)

Equally worrying is the attempt by certain police forces to give quasi-official approval of a law which does not exist. The Public Order Act 1986 covers so-called hate crimes, which the Metropolitan Police define as “abusing people because of their race, faith, religion or disability—or because they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transsexual” (*Daily Telegraph*, 10 November 03). In fact, the Act does not include any crime which is committed for other than racial hatred.

However, the police are to a large degree prefiguring what the situation will be in a year or two’s time. Already the opportunities for prosecutions based on racial hatred have been greatly widened to include not merely incitement to racial hatred but to punish more heavily any crime deemed to have a racial motive. As racism is defined ever more widely to include virtually any distinction between peoples, the courts and the police have a very great opportunity to include a racial motive in a prosecution. In addition, there are growing calls for laws to extend to the areas which the Metropolitan police fondly fantasise are already covered.

Secrecy

Secrecy is the obverse of the censorship coin. To be actively prevented from knowing something is a form of censorship. Most particularly, it 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 understood by

“... since when have the police had political comment as part of their brief?”

many MPs. Worse, from the pathetic evasions of the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, it is clear that Parliament and consequently the British people had been kept in the dark over secret agreements between the British and French Governments, which obligated Britain to go to war if France was attacked. And so off Britain went to war, ostensibly because of an 1839 treaty Britain had signed guaranteeing 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.

It is absolutely important to understand that free expression and a free media are an integral part of democracy, but they can formally exist and yet be restricted greatly if secrecy is practised by government. Democracy and openness of government go hand in hand. Take away openness and democracy is breached.

Democracy and Freedom of Expression

Opposition in the modern world means reasonable access to the various mass media. Without that free expression is an empty shell for, as wise dictators have always known, two shepherds on a hillside defaming the government is nothing, while a hundred thousand people demonstrating in the capital city or a television station broadcasting criticism of government is much. But our public life, including politics, is currently rigidly controlled, on all matters except perhaps the economy, by those who broadly subscribe to a left/liberal programme - what might be termed The Liberal Ascendency. Think, for example, of what educationalists did to sabotage Tory attempts to right the decline in educational standards between 1979 and 1997.

The only true democracy lies in freedom of expression, which requires both the absence of restrictive laws and the statutory guarantee of its exercise to be meaningful. Unless the current embargo on views contrary to those of the Liberal Ascendency is broken, Britain's claim to political liberty is a sham. It is, indeed, a strange kind of freedom which is so hemmed by law and circumstance.

The idea which is the bedrock of western morality, the primacy of the individual, is a fragile psychological edifice which can only be guaranteed by free expression. Moreover, it is an idea which is constantly under threat because the primacy of the individual is little valued by most societies and its social corollary—a practical concern for individual liberty—is an even rarer cultural artefact. Indeed, it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that only in English society, and those societies deriving from it, is the notion of individual liberty built into the social fabric. The English have been free not primarily because of legal rights, but because it is their evolved social nature. They accept lib-

erty because it seems natural to them. But that freedom has always rested on the willingness of the Public Class both to behave in a reasonable fashion and to allow criticism. Hayek, coming to England as a foreigner between the Wars noted both the special quality of English life and the threat to its continuance:

It is one of the most disheartening spectacles of our time to see to what extent some of the most precious things which England has given to the world are now held in contempt in England herself. The English hardly know to what degree they differ from most other people in that they all, irrespective of party, hold, to a greater or less extent, the ideas which in their most pronounced form are known as liberalism. [*The Road To Serfdom*, 1944, chapter XIV. Hayek, of course, used liberalism in its uncorrupted individualistic sense.]

Freedom of expression is every man's best guarantee of freedom.

How to Safeguard Freedom of Expression

We should begin with a bonfire of most of the legal restraints. Libel and slander may be replaced by a statutory right of reply; the equal opportunities and race-related statutes should be repealed in toto for they not only restrict free expression but practically abrogate the principle of equality before the law; blasphemy and obscenity should depart on the grounds that no group has the right to constrain another simply on the grounds that views are offensive to one side.

Legal restrictions relating to confidence and the Official Secrets Act could be replaced by a law of contractual confidence which clearly states any obligations placed on the person accepting an overt (not implied) contract of employment. No other law of confidence should exist.

A potent freedom of information act (the present one is an insult to the intelligence with its manifold exemptions) should be passed which allows access to all government and municipal papers of general interest—that is everything which is not related to a particular individual—except papers concerned with limited and clearly defined military matters such as battle plans, equipment specifications and computer codes relating to such things as the launch of nuclear missiles. The stipulation of papers relating only to matters of a general interest would prevent public prying into such records as individual tax returns. The passing of such an act would also place severe limits to the contractual limitations on free expression placed on public servants.

The mention of freedom of information acts always brings knowing scoffing from the self-identified political sophisticates of politics and the mass media. Faced with such a proposal they

"We should begin with a bonfire of most of the legal restraints."

nudge one another and sigh with a resigned, patronising smile before saying that all that would happen is that politicians would decide things privately whilst dissembling in public. I should be most interested to know exactly how such duplicitous behaviour could be translated into practical measures. If, for example, the present Cabinet secretly wished to re-nationalise the railways whilst publicly supporting privatisation, it could not carry the renationalisation through and expect no one to notice.

It is true, of course, that legislation may be presented as something it is not, but that is a present evil without the existence of a freedom of meaningful freedom of information act. With such an act misrepresentation would be, in principle, subject to greater and more informed scrutiny and consequently open to fiercer pressure for amendment. Nor do I believe that politicians would be able to dissemble successfully in public all of the time.

Injunctions to prevent the expression of views and physical demonstrations are a problem for they are potent weapons of suppression in the hands of the influential and powerful, especially if those hands form the government of the day. In addition, the police have practically unlimited powers to prevent a man speaking if it is judged that the words uttered are 'likely to cause a breach of the peace' and may limit public demonstrations virtually at will.

As for the customary restraints, a statutory right of reply would go a long way to ensuring fair play for the individual in their relations with the press. There would remain a problem in the case of books and pamphlets, but rarely is someone attacked in a book or pamphlet with a wide circulation who does not have access to the media.

Broadcasts present a different problem from printed matter because their numbers are practically limited with current technology, in the case of terrestrial national channels severely limited. There is also a considerable difference between writing a letter or article for publication, which most people should either be able to do or to find someone who is willing to write on their behalf, and broadcasting a reply which could be beyond many people. However, many would be able to cope with the demands of a pre-recorded broadcast and those who could not cope could have a written statement read on their behalf.

The great problem is that of a general bias within the elite, especially the mainstream media. In the case of broadcasters, there are already formal restraints on bias, but these are honoured almost entirely in the breach. To a degree bias is mitigated by the internet, but we are still a very long way from an equality of readership or prestige between the mass media and the internet. A right

to reply would further shift the balance towards fairness, but there would still be a massive advantage for those who share the liberal internationalist ideology currently favoured by our elite.

There is an obvious danger in governments becoming directly or even indirectly involved in controlling what the media should publish. Nonetheless, the danger of government censorship and propaganda can be largely obviated if a law places the regulation of the media in the hands of the ordinary citizen through a mechanism which contains two facets. The first is that the obligations it places on the media must be properly defined. For example, the law must not merely state that balance must be achieved, which it does in connection with broadcasting already, it must clearly define what balance means in practice. This could mean that in any television or radio debate on a contentious subject the participants in the debate must be balanced in numbers as well as views—goodbye to the beloved BBC “balanced” interview of three liberal internationalists “debating” a subject.

The second facet is that the enforcement of the law must be free of government influence such as one will invariably get in the appointment of a regulatory authority. Such a mechanism would be the right of any individual to challenge imbalance in the courts not as a matter of judicial review which is expensive and contentious in its application, but through a relatively cheap and simple procedure, such as exists in the application for an injunction.

To prevent political restrictions on free expression, we need a written constitution which explicitly guards the right to free expression. To do that it must forbid any government from introducing either laws which restrict it or practices such as codes of conduct for public servants which gag them from exposing bad behaviour in public bodies or force them to promote political views, such as happens now with the practitioners of political correctness.

The constitution should also contain provisions to ensure that the police (1) do not abuse their powers to harass and intimidate those whose views do not meet with the approval of those with power and influence and (2) apply the law equally to all, something they manifestly do not do at present in politically inconvenient cases.

Conclusion

At present, we have a very restricted range of permitted opinion, which is becoming ever narrower through new laws and the tightening grip of political correctness. The fact that public figures bleat ever more frenetically of our “right to free expression” reminds me irresistibly of the lines:

“... we need a written constitution which explicitly guards the right of free expression.”

‘The more he spoke of his honour,
The faster we counted our spoons.’

The dangerous truth is that we are moving towards a situation where we shall not only have no free speech spoons to count, we shall not even be allowed to mention their loss.

If we wish to preserve our freedom, we must realise that such liberty as we enjoy is an ineffably

hard won and fragile right which has been won over four centuries or more and that what was gained so slowly may be lost in a day if a government has the tyrannical urge.

Freedom of expression is an absolutely necessary condition for a free society. It is the fulcrum of freedom for it is the intellectual point at which a society may place a moral lever to lift it above tyranny.

SOCIETY FOR INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM: MINUTES OF THE 2003 AGM

Date, Time, and Place: The meeting was held at the Westminster Arms, Storey’s Gate, London, on the 8th October 2003, 5.15pm.

Members Present: The Lord Monson, Dr Barry Bracewell-Milnes, Michael Plumbe, Lucy Ryder, Nigel Meek, Howard Hammond-Edgar, Peter Jackson, David Wedgwood, Don Furness, Professor Antony Flew, Robert Henderson, Peter Wakley, Jenny Wakley, and Ian Mutch. Apologies had been received from Paul Anderton, Cynthia Campbell-Savours, Mariella Wolf, and Martin Ball.

The minutes of the 2002 AGM will be approved in committee and then published in *The Individual*. [Please refer to the September 2003 issue.]

Chairman’s Report: Michael Plumbe gave an interim verbal report. The subsequent written version can be found on the next page.

Treasurer’s Report: Reports for the past two years were circulated and adopted. The Treasurer, Lucy Ryder, reported that our investments have gone up this year and we now have £4000 in the bank and £4000 invested. It is to our advantage to have money in the Civic Education & Research Trust (CERT) as this is tax-free. This month CERT will be publishing *Race Warriors* by Russell Lewis. Miss Ryder recommended that we should spend money against a good return. On memberships, we still have a proportion of members who are not paying the full subscription. She felt that new members should be energetically encouraged to pay by standing order.

Election of Officers: The following were elected to office: President, The Lord Monson; Chairman of the National Council, Dr Barry Bracewell-Milnes; Vice-Presidents, Sir Richard Body, Professor David Myddleton, and Dr Barry Bracewell-Milnes; Hon. Treasurer, Lucy Ryder; Chairman of the Executive Committee, Michael Plumbe; Hon. Editor and Hon. Membership Secretary, Nigel Meek; Joint Hon. Secretaries Peter Jackson and Jenny Wakley; Webmaster, Howard Hammond-Edgar; Social Secretary Cynthia Campbell-Savours.

Election of Officers to the National Council: The re-election of those due to retire after three years was proposed by Michael Plumbe and seconded by Lucy Ryder: Cynthia Campbell-Savours, Amber Astron-Christo, Michael Plumbe, Kenneth Eckersley, Rhoda Zeffert, Mariella Wolf, Ralph Shuffrey, Martin Ball, Professor David Myddleton, and Jenny Wakley. [The Society is sad to report that Mariella Wolf died shortly afterwards.]

Any Other Business: Peter Jackson reported on Tell-IT and was thanked for all his work. The report will be published in *The Individual* [see elsewhere in this issue] and on the website. Lord Monson spoke of the launch of the CERT book—*Race Warriors* by Russell Lewis—which would take place at Politico’s bookshop at 6.30pm on the 28th October 2003 and hoped that as many as possible would attend. It was agreed that a flyer advertising the book should go out in the next *The Individual*.

The meeting was then closed.

“The Treasurer...
reported that our
investments have
gone up this
year...”

The universal motto of all governments...

“From you according to your ability, to us according to our wants.”

SOCIETY FOR INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM: MINUTES OF THE 2003 NATIONAL COUNCIL MEETING

Date, Time, and Place: The meeting was also held at the Westminster Arms immediately following the SIF AGM.

Election of the Executive Committee: This was proposed by Jenny Wakley and seconded by Lucy Ryder.

Chairman's Report: Dr Bracewell-Milnes reported that it had been an uneventful year for the National Council, which is how we liked it to be.

The meeting was then closed.

SOCIETY FOR INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM: CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR THE 2003 AGM

Michael Plumbe

Meetings with Speakers

Note: I submitted an oral report at the AGM. In this written version I am including details of the talk after the AGM.

We have only organised two meetings this year but both are important.

In May, Lindsay Jenkins, author of *Britain Held Hostage: The Coming Euro-Dictatorship* and *The Last Days of Britain: The Final Betrayal*, spoke on "Elites versus the People: The Case of the EU". Tonight, Stuart Millson spoke on "Banana Republic Britain: Blair's Legacy to Public Services and Traditional Liberty". Although the SIF must be aloof from politics as such, it is clear that politics within the EU are producing an ever-increasing number of threats to individual freedom. Lindsay Jenkins gave us chapter-and-verse on aspects of this topic in worrying detail. Stuart Millson's talk tonight, albeit centred on more specific similar threats in the UK, has also shown how much of what is happening stems from involvement in the EU. We are most grateful to both speakers.

After these meetings, we adjourned to a nearby hostelry for an informal supper with the speaker. This was enjoyed by all and will we hope become a regular part of our evenings.

Nigel Meek has again prepared excellent publicity material for our meetings.

We have been unable to organise a luncheon this year. [Note: By courtesy of Lord Monson, a luncheon is now being arranged for Tuesday 16th March 2004 in the House of Lords.]

Campaigns and Projects

(1) Tell-It: 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.

(2) Vitamin Supplements: We reported at the AGM last year and in *The Individual* on how regulations now being pushed through by the EU are going to make it impossible for small manufacturers to continue supplying vitamin supplements and age-old traditional remedies. Angie Gilchrist participated in setting up a protest group with What Doctors Don't Tell You (WDDTY) but had to give up her activities here. So, whilst we have not ourselves had the resources to do more than monitor what is happening, I am glad to say that a number of other organisations are actively taking things further now. If any reader has time to attend the occasional meeting of the main campaign group run by WDDTY, do please let us know.

(3) Internet: Thanks to the efforts of our webmaster Howard Hammond-Edgar and Nigel Meek, our website is looking better than ever. We get a steady stream of "hits" which generate good comments and, from time to time, new members. This is all most useful in furthering the aims of the Society.

(4) 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.

The Individual

In many societies, producing a magazine is a constant struggle. We are therefore so lucky to have the team of Nigel Meek, the Editor and Publisher,

"Thanks to the efforts of our webmaster Howard Hammond-Edgar... our website is looking better than ever."

and Robert Stevens, the Producer and Distributor, working to give us regular issues of *The Individual*. I never cease to be impressed by the erudition of the articles Nigel selects or writes himself, to the extent that I confess sometimes to having to study the work properly rather than skim-read it in my usual fashion.

To me, *The Individual* is at present about the most important single activity of the Society. I am happy indeed that it is in such capable hands. May I on behalf of the Society also thank all contributors, members or otherwise, and the several proof-readers who have helped behind the scenes.

Choice in Personal Safety (CIPS)

The arrangements for bringing CIPS under the "umbrella" of SIF have now been finalised and seem to be working well. Don Furness, CIPS Chairman, now contributes CIPS material to *The Individual* when appropriate. CIPS members, if not also SIF members, pay their own subscription which is shared with SIF. Don and his team continue to monitor occurrences where seat-belt compulsion has proved injurious or even fatal. As far as their resources allow, they also now cover other instances where compliance with the law is sometimes harmful. Don has a wealth of material accumulated by the late Gordon Read from the early days of CIPS. This is largely statistical and is a valuable archive. If anyone wishes to consult this, or to help with storage and cataloguing, please make contact with Don. Dr Barry Bracewell-Milnes has kindly assisted with "subsuming" CIPS into SIF and has acted as the SIF representative here.

Representation on Campaign for Freedom of Information

Michael Champness has relinquished his role attending CFoI meetings and reporting to us. We thank him for what he has done on our behalf for the last several years. We are glad to report that

Robert Henderson has agreed to take his place.

Officers and Committee

May I first sadly report two deaths; those of first Lord Blake, a long-standing member and worthy initial supporter of SIF, and second Mariella Wolf. Mariella too was an early member and was on the Committee when I myself joined. Indeed it was she (and Lucy Ryder) who first welcomed me into the Society. The team doing most of the work soldiers on. Lucy looks after our money most capably. Jenny Wakley, with help from Rhoda Zeffertt, has regularised our minutes and proceedings. Peter Jackson has maintained his interest in the Society and done his full share of work when available. Nigel Meek, working both as Editor and as Membership Secretary, does an invaluable job. We continue to receive encouragement and advice from Lord Monson; he makes time whenever he can to attend meetings. Barry Bracewell-Milnes remains Chairman of the National Council, thank goodness.

Other members, either of the committee or as ordinary members, who have helped include Paul Anderton, Martin Ball, Cynthia Campbell-Savours, Michael Champness, Howard Hammond-Edgar, Robert Henderson, Robert Stevens and David Wedgwood. However large or small their contribution, the Society could not operate properly without them.

Let me close by again acknowledging a substantial donation from one member, whose help is greatly appreciated.

The Future

I repeat what I have said before. There is much useful work for us still to do but we need more activists. It is so frustrating to see threats to Individual Freedom not being challenged. At least it is good to see quite a few new members this year.

Do we have your email address?

For organisations like the SIF, printing and postage make up a huge proportion of costs. *The Individual* will continue to go out in its present form to all members and many others besides. However, it would help us enormously if we could send out as many as possible notices of meetings and events by email. If you have an email address and would be happy to receive notices in this fashion, please send a message to...

members@individualist.org.uk

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*The SIF's Aim:
To Promote Responsible Individual Freedom*

The SIF believes...

- ✓ That the individual, rather than the State, is the primary source of morality and authority.
- ✓ That private citizens should have the freedom to act as they wish provided their actions do not harm others, and that the law should exist principally to guarantee such individual liberty and not to act as a paternalistic guardian; in the primacy of freely negotiated contract; and in Parliament as the supreme law-making body in the United Kingdom.
- ✓ That an efficient free-market economy benefits all, and that the State's economic function should mainly be limited to the prevention of violence and fraud and similar obstacles to honest competition and co-operation.
- ✓ That taxes in the United Kingdom are far too high and erode individual responsibility and enterprise; and that in a truly free society citizens, with the benefit of higher post-tax earnings, would be free to decide upon their own priorities, with usually temporary government assistance concentrated upon cases of unavoidable hardship.
- ✓ That justice shall be administered by courts that are not subject to political pressure; and that government decisions have no validity unless founded on clear legal authority.
- ✓ That to preserve the liberties of private individuals we need more independent-minded Members of Parliament, a stronger Second Chamber, and more effective parliamentary control over the executive.
- ✓ That there is too much influence on government from pressure groups that call for legislation of an unnecessary and restrictive nature, thus not only adding to the material burdens on individuals and corporate bodies but reducing one's capacity to learn personal responsibility, self-reliance, and voluntary co-operation.

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 always 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.

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.

Could You Write for *The Individual*?

We are always looking for contributions to *The Individual* corresponding with some aspect of the aims and beliefs of the SIF. These can range from referenced essays of an academic nature to personal opinions, experiences, and insights.

The subject might be almost anything that you can think of. It can be something of your own or in response to another's contribution in *The Individual* or elsewhere.

Length can range from a few hundred words to several thousand. Submissions should preferably be in electronic format, although this may not always be essential.

If you have never written for publication before, then don't worry. We are happy to give

advice and will never publish anything without the author's final approval.

As well as being published in hardcopy form, *The Individual* will also be uploaded onto the SIF's website.

We also welcome letters in response to articles printed in *The Individual* or other aspects of the SIF's activities.

If you think that you might be interested, then please contact us using the details on this page.

The Editor of *The Individual* and the Management Committee of the SIF reserve the right not to use any submission.