

THE INDIVIDUAL

Newsletter of the Society for Individual Freedom

President : Lord Monson
Chairman : Sir Richard Body MP

April 1991

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

Cancellation of April meeting

We regret having to cancel the meeting scheduled for 24 April, at which Mr Peter Shore MP would have been the speaker. We expect to include a talk by him in our next programme.

Roger Scruton on Wednesday 29 May

Professor Roger Scruton, whose vigorous polemical writings are well known to readers of *The Sunday Telegraph* and other newspapers, and who founded and edits *The Salisbury Review*, the quarterly journal of Conservative thought, will be talking to the Society on Wednesday 29 May at 6.30 pm in the upstairs room at The Red Lion, Parliament Street, London SW1. He will be giving us 'The Comments of a Conservative'.

Annual General Meeting on Wednesday 12 June

The annual general meeting which had to be postponed last autumn will be held on Wednesday 12 June at 6.30 pm in the Jubilee Room at the House of Commons. Refreshments will be served at the end of the meeting. Further information about the meeting is enclosed for members of the Society.

Reducing Freedom

By every post a Member of Parliament receives at least one letter, usually several, urging that the Government does something. In the correspondence columns of most of our daily newspapers there is often a similar letter. And there is a long list of pressure groups whose sole purpose is to achieve this objective of persuading the Government to 'do' something.

Indeed, it seems every pressure group or politically grounded organisation has this desire upon the government. The one glorious exception is the Society of Individual Freedom. It wants our government to do less.

The essential reason for our stand can be stated with a simple proposition. It is this: the government can 'do' nothing for us unless it first takes away our money or our liberty. Usually it has to take away both in order to do what is asked of it.

Giving a government this additional power over our money means that it spends it for us in a way we would not spend it ourselves. By interfering with our liberty, it requires us to behave in a way we would not otherwise do.

Such truths should be obvious, but do they matter? Of the many reasons, there are surely two which matter very much. In the first place we invite the government (through Parliament) to invoke powers of coercion. Until we entered the European Community, our Parliament alone had the power to legislate and to tax, which are the two main sovereign powers exercised by the elected representatives of a sovereign nation. Although the Treaty of Rome has diminished those powers, the coercive effect still exists. Some court of law will send us to prison when we refuse to pay our taxes or decline to surrender our liberty.

Letter-writing constituents and campaigning pressure groups (the SIF excepted) therefore believe their fellow men and women should be coerced (that is, sent

to prison) if they do not change their ways. Perhaps these powers of coercion should be extended, but let us not forget the implication. Nor, incidentally, let us overlook that eleven years of Thatcherism have given us another 700 laws to obey.

The second reason why we should question this trend of getting the government to do still more for us is that it inhibits the growth of responsibility. As children become older, we give them more freedom in order that they should become more responsible. Yet the modern adult is being required to accept the opposite principle. In millions of households today, there are parents who, having paid for their essentials of living and their taxes, have less money to spend as they would wish than their teenage children who have just taken their first job in life.

Are we then stepping steadily closer to an irresponsible society? Logic suggests that we are.

RICHARD BODY

Freedom in the streets

In an article in *The Times* on 25 February Matthew Parris, the former Conservative MP and a keen friend of freedom, drew attention to the fact that local authorities are being empowered to appoint litter officers to go about ordering people to pick up any litter they drop: refusal can result in a 'fixed penalty' notice and the accused can pay by post or contest the case in the courts. He could also refuse to reveal his identity or even walk away. If he fought the case he could deny the evidence but it is expected that people will be too gentlemanly to do other than pick up their litter.

What next: noise wardens to deal with anti-social citizens playing radios in public places? Dress wardens to deal with

people who dress shabbily or outrageously? Matthew Parris noted that in Thailand a draft law penalises 'those deemed harmful to society', including those who 'loaf around in public'. He could also have mentioned that in England the courts have in several cases already convicted two men who kissed each other on meeting or separating in public: they were found guilty of insulting behaviour or conduct liable to cause a breach of the peace.

We may not like all that we see happening - but how far should our dislike be carried?

WESTMINSTER WATCHER