

FREE LIFE

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Edward Gibbon (1737-94)

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Potential contributors are urged to write to the Editor for a "style Sheet and Guidance for LA Writers" - though it is worth adding that nobody ever has asked for one, and the Editor has not seen one since November 1991.

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A Note on Contributors



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Stuart Horgan is a Conservative Councillor and a member of the Conservative opposition group on Basildon Council

Jeremy Stanford edits *The Critical Journal*, which can be found at <http://www.eurocritic.demon.co.uk/>.

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Robert Henderson is a writer and media critic with a strong interest in the utter destruction of Tony Blair

Helen Szamuely is a political researcher and writer with a strong interest in helping to destroy the European Union.

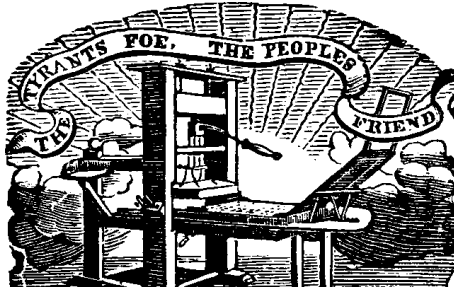
Peter Tatchell is no friend of Tony Blair.

Dennis O'Keeffe is the Senior Lecturer in Sociology of Education at the University of North London.

Marian Halcombe has emerged from under her Welsh mountain, disappointed to find the world undestroyed by the Millennium Bug.

Howard Perkins reemerged with Mrs Halcombe, and insists that he learned much in their time together.

Brian Micklethwait is the Editorial Director of the Libertarian Alliance.



Vote For Peter Tatchell!

It is, perhaps, rather early for *Free Life* to be endorsing any candidate for the London elections. But I have been asked by Peter Tatchell to carry his Manifesto for London. Mr Tatchell has decided to run not for Mayor, but for a seat in the London Assembly, from which he can support Ken Livingstone as Mayor. He takes this election very seriously, so far as his manifesto contains what I presume to be a detailed programme of what he and Mr Livingstone intend to do in London.

I could have carried Mr Tatchell's manifesto without comment, or with a brief note explaining that I disagreed with much of it but had promised to include it in the current issue before reading it. On reflection, I have decided not merely to carry the manifesto, but to endorse Mr Tatchell as a candidate in the Assembly elections - and therefore to endorse Mr Livingstone as Mayor of London.

Doubtless, this will spoil breakfast for most of my readers. Indeed, if the Sean Gabb of 1983 could be brought forward to read the above words, he would rub his eyes with astonishment. I campaigned against Mr Tatchell on the Conservative side in the Bermondsey by-election; and though I am glad to say I made no comment on the doorsteps about his sexual preferences, I made much of his hard left credentials. At the same time, I denounced Mr Livingstone as the living incarnation of evil. Indeed, I still deplore his support for the armed terrorists of the IRA. But I reply now to my readers, as I would to my earlier self, that times are altered.

In the first place, I have reconsidered my views of Mr Tatchell. While he retains much of the silliness and bad economic thinking of Old Labour, he is a man of honour and decency. It is easy nowadays to be liberal about homosexuality. It is even fashionable. But Mr Tatchell has been campaigning on the issue since he was 17 and is by far the most sensible and persuasive of the gay rights advocates. It was his deliberate flouting of the law that stopped the Metropolitan Police from using the public decency laws against homosexuals - and therefore also from wasting the taxpayers' money. It was his tireless campaigning that did most to bring the lowering of the gay age of consent onto the political agenda; and when the age of consent is equalised at 16, this will be very largely his achievement. I do not wholly agree with his call for a further lowering to 14, but I am not shocked by this; and I am impressed by his honesty in saying what he wants.

Unlike most gay rights advocates, Mr Tatchell is also a libertarian on other issues. I note, for example, how his manifesto calls for a Royal Commission to look into the decriminalisation of

recreational drugs. This is not the same as legalisation - not at all the same as calling for heroin to be as easy to buy as alcohol. But it is further in the right direction than any candidate from the main parties will dare advance. Equally, his proposal to shift the local tax burden from small to large firms should be welcomed. After all, small firms are nearly always private in the genuine sense. Large ones are usually incorporated under the Companies Acts, and are little more than semi-autonomous agents of the State.

In the second place, the rank socialism of much else in the manifesto should no longer be seen as a threat to civilisation. A minimum wage of £4.50 per hour would make it illegal to employ anyone whose labour is - for whatever reason - worth less than this; and it would drive tens of thousands of women and non-whites and young people either out of the work force or into the informal economy. But I doubt if the money or regulatory power would be available for the Government of London to enforce any of this. As for the rest, I cannot imagine that Frank Dobson and his team would "promote renewable energy with an avenue of power-generating windmills on the forecourt of the GLA headquarters". But neither can I imagine that either Mr Tatchell or Mr Livingstone would sit smirking quietly in a Cabinet that was prating about its "ethical" foreign policy while murdering Serbian and Iraqi civilians by the thousand.

Which fact brings me to the strongest reason for this endorsement. Libertarians have no permanent friends or enemies in politics. Our ultimate loyalty is to freedom. We opposed Messrs Livingstone and Tatchell in the 1980s because their victory would have been more harmful than helping the Conservative Party to stay in government. But the battles of the 1980s are over, and the hard left was defeated. To echo John Morley's words on Burke, we must periodically shift our front if we wish to defend the same ground. The greatest danger to freedom comes now from all that Tony Blair represents. We have seen ancient landmarks smashed into dust, and a style of government that owes more to Mussolini and Juan Peron than anything in the English tradition.

Only Ken Livingstone can defeat Frank Dobson in the mayoral election. He therefore deserves the support of everyone - regardless of what he did and said in the 1980s - who wants to give Mr Blair a bloody nose. If he is not to be a virtual prisoner, his budget and other administrative decisions overridden by a Labour and Conservative pact, he needs supporters in the London Assembly. Mr Tatchell can be trusted to give that support.

Sean Gabb

Reflections on the Current State of British Politics

Sean Gabb

Editor's Note: This article was first published as a *Free Life Commentary* and was sent out to the usual thousand subscribers and exposed on the usual newsgroups and distribution lists to perhaps another 20,000 people. It also found its way into *The Times*. In his article "Sceptic website sets out to topple Hague", published on the 28th February this year, Roland Watson quoted the "strategic" sentences in which I explain how we can take over the Conservative Party just as the Militants took over Labour in the early 1980s.

Mr Watson's article seems to have caused a wild panic in Central Office. This was communicated to a Conservative grouping - I am too polite to name it - that believed its pitifully small donation had given it a controlling interest in my Candidlist. At one point, I was "ordered" to take the List down. Of course, I treated this "order" with the contempt it deserved.

There are still many people who believe that Mr Watson had somehow attacked me and tried to damage the credibility of the Candidlist. I disagree. No article is ever published in a British newspaper but some interest groups want it put there. But whatever agenda Mr Watson was serving, I do not see how it was hostile to me. The article was accurate in its quotations from me, and correct in its understanding of my motives - though I must say that he goes a little too far in ascribing these motives to the Libertarian Alliance as a whole. Beyond this, it gave me even more publicity, and attracted over 3,000 visitors in one day to the Candidlist Web Site.

I telephoned Mr Watson at *The Times* to thank him for the publicity and to compliment him on his accuracy, and I have awarded him a subscription to *Free Life*. I hope he enjoys it.

Because of its notoriety, I follow this article with three replies that take issue with my case.

What I wish here to ask is whether we want the Conservatives to win the next election - "we" being conservatives and libertarians. Now, I am sure many will think this an irrelevant question. To ask if something is desirable usually requires a belief in its possibility; and the Conservatives are in what often seems a terminal mess. They are badly led, without money, and without credibility. They have been facing a Government consistently ahead in the opinion polls. Since 1997, all that most people have thought it worth asking about the next election is how big might be the Labour majority. However, looking ahead from February 2000, the outcome of that election is becoming less certain.

First, there are the electoral mechanics. Labour won its big majority last time with just 45 percent of the vote, which is less than the Conservatives got in 1992. One reason was the electoral pact between Labour and the Liberal Democrats. A Conservative Party with 31 per cent of the vote had to face a reasonably united 62 per cent, and was horribly squeezed. But with Paddy Ashdown gone, this pact is dissolved, and the two "progressive" parties are back to hating each other more than they hate the Conservatives. This being so, the Conservatives do not need to pick up a single extra vote next time to cut the Labour majority to around 60.

Second, the Conservatives will pick up extra votes. Economic stability aside - and this is mostly the delayed effect of the Thatcher reforms - the past three years of Labour in government have been a disaster. The

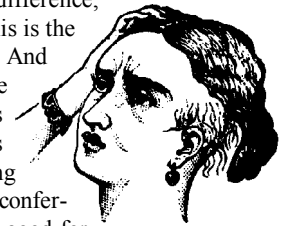
House of Lords has been destroyed with no regard for constitutional balance. Devolution has revealed Scottish and Welsh *élites* as corrupt and incompetent as any in Eastern Europe, and has encouraged a wave of anti-English hatred. Trial by Jury and other fundamental rights are being torn apart with reasons of cost given as an increasingly feeble excuse. The BBC, the Bench and the Civil Service have all been packed with friends of the Prime Minister, and are beginning to work as divisions of the Labour Party. We have been twice to war since 1997 - with Serbia and Iraq. In neither case was any British interest involved. Both wars involved the avoidable killing of civilians and were justified by a wall of lies. Our "ethical foreign policy" is a matter of sucking up to every mass murderer who might be inclined to buy some cattle prods from British Aerospace.

Then there is Europe. After years of indifference, the electors are coming to agree that this is the most important single issue in politics. And they suspect Labour of being on the wrong side. Mr Blair has dropped his earlier enthusiasm for the Euro, and has been firm so far against the withholding tax. Even so, the inter-governmental conference set for later this year will not be good for Labour. The proposals for closer integration will amount to a common European state, giving this country less self-government than California has. Labour may resist these proposals - indeed, it probably must resist them if it wants to avoid rioting in the streets. But this will mean abandoning its whole policy on Europe.

And so we have a Government that is widely seen as incompetent and tyrannical and at least passively hostile to the interests of English people. Though not yet likely, it is possible that the next election will go badly for Labour. Perhaps disillusioned Labour voters will stay at home, while Conservatives turn out in large numbers. Perhaps Europe will become important enough to produce defections from Labour on the same scale as in the 1980s. Perhaps the Conservatives will win a small majority in England while a nationalist push squeezes Labour in Scotland and Wales. Even as the Ministers are assuring us about a generation to come of unbroken Labour rule, the forces may be gathering that will throw them back into opposition before the spring of 2001. Some Labour supporters in the media have seen this and are alarmed. Anything is possible.

This being said, is it desirable? It is nice to see people like Hugo Young in his first serious panic since 1992. It is even nicer to imagine the removal vans in Downing Street. The problem is that it would mean having William Hague as Prime Minister, Michael Portillo as Chancellor, Ann Widdicombe as Home Secretary, and perhaps Francis Maude as Foreign Secretary. Is this something to be desired - even by the bitterest enemies of Tony Blair? I suggest that the answer is no. For anyone really concerned about national independence and personal freedom, the last thing needed is a Conservative government of the kind presently offered. Let me explain.

The Modern Conservative Party is built on deception. Its leaders have been experts at complaining about problems they do not intend to solve. Since the War, they have known just how much to complain, and just how little definitely to promise, to gather in the votes from their supporters. Invariably, they have said one thing in opposition and done entirely otherwise in government. In the 1970s, they warned about the dangers of "elective dictatorship", and began haltingly to



speak the language of classical liberalism. Once back in office, they remodelled the Constitution, giving documents like *Magna Carta* and the Bill of Rights the same practical respect as the Italian Government might give the Twelve Tables or the *Lex Regia*. With the Single European Act and the Treaty of Maastricht, they helped transform the European Union from a customs union into a federal state. It is difficult to recall a betrayal more complete.

They did not do this from principle. To speak of these people as having principles in the manner of Tony Benn or Enoch Powell would be ridiculous. They are in politics simply to advance their own benefit. Some are there for the bribes, some for the sex, some for the thrill of the red boxes and ministerial cars. Scarcely any are there because they are conscious of unusual talents and a desire to serve the public good. But neither have they been indiscriminately corrupt. They are guided in their pursuit of personal benefit by certain assumptions about the world; and by imposing a consistency on their behaviour, these supply the want of principle in the same way as a neck brace supplies the want of healthy bone and muscle.

The most important of these assumptions is that the nation state is an "outmoded" institution. Looking into the future, they do not see how a small island like ours can remain independent, let alone wealthy and powerful. Like the Tory Imperialists of a hundred years ago, whose intellectual descendants they are in a vague and degraded way, they believe that the future lies with big, multinational federations - with big government and big business. Their repeated talk of influence in the world, of seats "at the top table" and of "punching above our weight", all proceeds from this assumption. That is why the older Conservative leaders clung so grimly to the American alliance, putting up with endless humiliation. And that is why the present ones cannot imagine that there is a case for withdrawing from the European Union. They do not need to like what is happening in Brussels. They can sometimes feel very angry and hurt by what is done there - as John Major did repeatedly. But they cannot see any alternative to staying in.

From this follows their contempt for English ways. For them, the past is dead - save perhaps as a commodified "heritage" that shows as a plus on the balance of payments. It was Conservative Governments

that destroyed the ancient county boundaries, and decimalised the currency and forced metrication on us with threats of fine and imprisonment, sneering at anyone who complained.

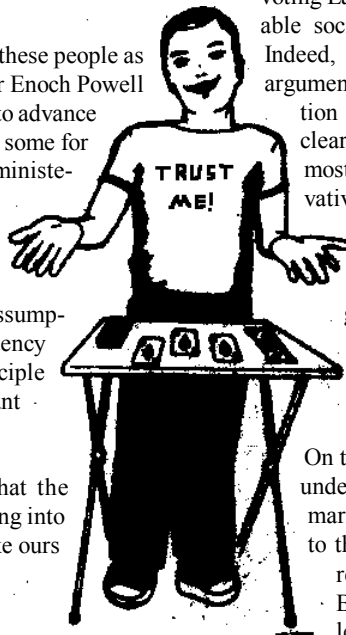
In the past, this deception was easily managed. There was an alternative party of government that was hostile to the European project. But voting Labour meant having the country run by more or less unendurable socialists who would destroy everything else worth saving. Indeed, when Labour was at its most anti-European, the main argument in English politics was not Europe, but taxes and privatisation and other economic matters. Enoch Powell may have been clear-sighted enough never to lose sight of the main issue, but most even of his supporters were willing to put up with a Conservative leadership that was quietly abolishing the country. Every so often, the leaders would move a little too fast. But the murmurings and even the odd explosion of outrage that resulted could generally be soothed by a few patriotic gestures, a few speeches larded with quotes from Edmund Burke, and a waving of the Union Flag. But during the past six years or so, this system of management has broken down. The reason is Europe.

On the one hand, the nature of the European project has become undeniable. It is no longer a question of helping create a single market, but of things like the Euro and *Corpus Juris*. Objections to these cannot be laughed at or lulled away with a few more refrains of *Land of Hope and Glory*. On the other hand, Tony Blair has broken the bond of fear between Conservative leaders and supporters. Though dreadful, Labour in government has not been immediately catastrophic. The Major and Hague leaderships have not been able to impose peace over Europe among their supporters by pointing to anything else of overriding importance.

Moreover, the leadership has been outclassed in its drift to European political union. The relevant big business and City interests, the federalists in the media and administration, and the foreign *élites*, no longer have to put up with the furtive, shuffling progress that was all a Conservative Government was able to offer. They now have a party unhampered by nationalist sentiment. The collapse of socialism has left the Labour leadership with few principles to fear among its supporters. Those principles that do remain powerful - multiculturalism and "anti-racism" - can be assimilated with little effort into support for the European project.

There are two conceivable positions the Conservative leadership could take on Europe. It could, like the UK Independence Party, campaign for withdrawal. Or it could, like the Liberal Democrats, accept Europe and compete with Labour to obtain the greatest alleged benefits at the greatest speed. Neither position is open. The latter would split the Party within half an hour. The former is unthinkable. As said, it is not only the bribes and applause of the Europhile interests that keeps the leadership committed to Europe. People like William Hague and Francis Maude do not believe in the viability of independence. Even if they decided to lie their heads off, they would sound as unhappy and hesitant as a committee of biologists hired to defend the creationist theory.

The resulting paralysis has given conservatives and libertarians our best opportunity in a generation to fight a clear and open battle for what we believe. The intellectual ferment of the 1970s was ultimately a failure, because it took place beside and within a Conservative Party always on the verge of power. The Freedom Association, the Institute of Economic Affairs, and most other of the dissenting organisations, were influenced where not controlled from Central Office. Too many of the personnel wanted seats in Parliament, or believed that, by being moderate, they could influence a Conservative Government. In



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Interested persons may apply in writing to the Editor of *Free Life*.

Following a series of European Union Directives - one of these assented to by Francis Maude - all enacted into the laws of this country, it is a criminal offence to offer goods for sale in English weights and measurements. The maximum penalty for disobedience is six months imprisonment.

There are some laws that it is our public duty to disobey. Compulsory metrication is one of them. And this advertisement will be varied and repeated without limit. By the way, it is placed by the Editor of *Free Life* with the knowledge and consent of the Proprietor, and does not necessarily reflect the opinion of anyone else connected with the Libertarian Alliance.

consequence, the radicals in this movement were marginalised. I must have spent weeks of my life in the late 1970s talking about free markets with the same five people and with the same chipped coffee mug in my hand. Otherwise I was handing out badly duplicated leaflets at fringe meetings. Though I was too young at the time to be important, all the older people I admired were also unimportant. Once in government, of course, the Conservative leaders used us, tainted us with their betrayal, and then abandoned us.

It has been different in the 1990s. The Libertarian Alliance, the Countryside Alliance, the Democracy Movement, the Cybershooters and the Eurofaq distribution lists, and so forth, have emerged not as allies or dupes of the Conservative leadership, but as rivals to it. The UK Independence Party has even taken votes and seats away from it. The Internet has helped, by bringing together communities of activists that could never before have existed, and by making publication both cheap and easy. But the lack of interference from Central Office has been perhaps more important. On a whole range of issues, the Conservative Party is no longer seen as the opposition to Labour. Instead of calling on some Conservative MP, the media people are increasingly turning to people like me to put the case against Government policy.

We are setting the agenda of debate within the Conservative Party. We have not won the debates, but the leadership is impotent to stop us from saying and doing as we like. Give us another five years of this, and we can probably capture the Conservative Party more surely than the left captured the Labour Party in the 1980s. With initiatives like my Candidlist - among many others - we can root out the careerists and ensure that people of good principle are elected in their place. Our predecessors in the 1970s believed that they could influence the Conservative Party at the top. We may be able to rebuild it from the bottom up - to the point where the William Hague and Francis Maudes can be replaced.

A Conservative recovery now would stop all this. If Labour really were to begin falling apart, William Hague would be the direct, immediate beneficiary. In office, he would make the easiest face-saving compromise with Brussels that he could - and short term compromise is always possible - and continue the same course of domestic betrayal and destruction that Tony Blair inherited from John Major. Whoever is in power, the next five years will be dreadful. By 2005, there will be surveillance cameras in all public and many private places. There will be identity cards required for all transactions. The police will be able to spy on people in their homes on the slightest suspicion. It will be possible for a man to be arrested and charged with offences that did not exist when we were children, and to be tried without a Jury on the basis of written evidence that he cannot efficiently call in question, but disproving which will be his duty if he wants to be acquitted. If the paid magistrates trying him should by some miracle acquit, his assets will all have been taken by some civil forfeiture process; and it will be possible to rearrest and retry him for the same offence as often as it takes the authorities to get a conviction before another magistrate. We then have the linked but separate malevolence of the race relations bureaucracies, the health fascists, the environmentalists, the general forces of political correctness, and any other special interest group that naturally has or can buy influence with the powers that be. These are the changes that Jack Straw and his friends are currently making or proposing - and that Ann Widdecombe and the other Conservative leaders are doing nothing substantial to oppose, because that is what they also want.

The difference is that these horrors at home and abroad are being opposed by a reasonably united conservative and libertarian movement. Replace Tony Blair with William Hague, and at once half the opposition would fall silent. Central Office would regain much of its old influence over the wider movement. The young careerists would

find their reasons for not pushing on certain issues. The loyalists would again believe in keeping quiet and trusting the leaders. The radicals, who now set the agenda, would be forced back to the fringes. When I go nowadays into a radio studio with a senior Conservative MP, I know that I am going to win whatever argument we are likely to have. He is too demoralised - still too shocked from the collapse of 1997 - to have any effective response to me. Let these people back into office, and the old confidence will return. I can almost imagine one of these creatures, twitching in his pin stripe suit as he explains that he represents "the electable wing of the Conservative Party", and how if anyone had listened to people like me, the Party would still be in opposition. In short, we would lose.

Granting certain minimal assumptions, we really are better off with Labour. So long as the New Labour police state is largely a domestic affair, it can be reversed by domestic means given the right political will. There is reason to think that Labour will not take the final, irreversible steps to tyranny. These would be the adoption of the Euro, or *Corpus Juris*, or the adoption of proportional representation at Westminster. Either of these first two would lock us into Europe so tightly that only violence might get us out again. The last would ensure permanent rule by Labour and Liberal Democrat coalition. At the moment, these are looking increasingly improbable.

Proportional representation was popular within the Labour Party while it is out of government. Since 1997, its popularity has declined. There is the experience of it in the Scottish Parliament, where it has made devolution into a joke and helped sour relations between Labour and the Liberal Democrats throughout the United Kingdom. There is the experience of it in the European elections last year, when it showed an ability to dissolve traditional patterns of support - and not always to Labour advantage. There is also the fact that Labour is in power and should remain there for at least several years to come, and that this is draining energy from all schemes of reform that might raise a large and unpredictable opposition without bringing any tangible benefit to the Government.

As for closer European involvement, the growing opposition within the country to the Euro, and the growing fears within the City about tax harmonisation and hostile regulation, probably mean that the high point of Labour's enthusiasm for Europe has now passed, and that we are back to the furtive, shuffling progress of the Thatcher and Major Governments. The pro-European rhetoric will continue, but there will be no entry to the Euro.

Combine all this with the corruption and mediocrity of the Ministers, and the chance that the modish radicalism they carried over from their student union days is subsiding, and we have the beginnings of quiescence on constitutional change. There will be continued changes elsewhere, and - as said - these will be horrible. But they will not be fundamental enough to destroy us as a nation in the next five years. There may be a crisis at the inter-governmental crisis that blows all these assumptions apart. But I do not think this will happen. As said, there is always room for compromise in the short term on Europe.

I have already mentioned the Labour left of 20 years ago. Some of my friends were part of this, and they gave me a set of arguments very similar to the above. The leadership had to be defeated, they told me, to make way for real socialism. Every electoral defeat for Labour was also a defeat for the leadership and a step closer to the victory of the militants. I can only say that the difference lies in the credibility of our programmes. Their organisation tactics were a success, but what my Labour friends wanted to do next could not be achieved. They were defeated by reality; and the less principled among them are now running a set of policies more Thatcherite than Margaret Thatcher herself would once have dared propose. But national independence and personal freedom are things that can be achieved. Give us time to take

over the Conservative Party, and we can win.

And so let us hope that the opinion polls are telling the truth about how people will vote. Perhaps they are. After all, William Hague is an astonishingly worthless leader. His problem with Europe is something he inherited and that would be faced by any other probable leader. But there are issues where he has had, and rejected, a greater freedom of action. Take last year's Serbian War. This was a blunder that sent Robin Cook into a nervous breakdown and accelerated the retreat of Mr Blair's hairline. The war was fought for no identifiable British interest, and in defiance of international law, and by means increasingly barbarous on our side. It was lost, in the sense that the Russians brokered a peace in exchange for a vast bribe and approval for their second Chechen War, and got Mr Milosevic better terms than had been offered before the bombing started. Since then, the NATO lies about genocide have been laid bare in almost every quality newspaper; and the only ethnic cleansing we have seen in Kosovo was of the Serbs by Albanian terrorists whom we had done much to arm.

Had Mr Hague denounced the war in March 1999, he might have suffered some immediate unpopularity. At best, however, he might have used the atrocities and final defeat to bring the Government down - one of those surprises that do sometimes happen to upset all the clever analyses. At worst, he would be now be seen as a man of principle, respected even by his enemies. As it was, he dithered and did nothing. Half his shadow cabinet wanted to support the war, half to oppose it. So he compromised, and supported the war in principle but criticised some of its details. Whatever the Government may have suffered because of its participation in the Serbian War, Mr Hague ensured that there was to be no gain for the Conservatives.

Yes, we are not now facing scoundrels as good as Robert Boothby and Quentin Hogg. We only need worry about a successor generation of political dwarves. It is not desirable that they should do well at the next election; and all things considered, it may be less likely that they will do well than the present state of the Government would normally allow.



Comments on Sean Gabb's Article

From Stuart Horgan (<http://www.horgan.co.uk>)

To summarise the lengthy article by Dr. Gabb, the answer to the question that he posed above was no. The logic appeared to be that a Conservative government would push Britain down a European integrationalist path little different to Labour and that now was the time for people like himself to grab hold of the European agenda.

I think he is wrong for a number of reasons. Firstly, Labour is a federalist party whose progress towards integrating Britain into a European superstate is only held back fear of an electoral backlash. In practical terms that means that they are scared of a Tory revival on the back of a Eurosceptic agenda. This fear is well founded as William Hague has placed the Party on the right side of the argument on the major European issues, for example the single currency. However, if the Conservatives do not win or at least do well at the next election than Labour's fear will fade and another five-year term of the current government will leave many of us wondering where our country has gone. Anything that undermines the Conservative cause at this point gives comfort to those who want a single European state with Britain as a province of it.

Secondly, the Conservative Party has had a generational change. European federalists are largely older and not in positions of power in the Party. Mr Hague has taken a lot of trouble and a lot of criticism to arrive at this point and he wouldn't have done it if he intended to fall back into the federalist consensus after the election. In any case the Party would not let him.

Thirdly, and probably most importantly, it is a simple fact that even a sceptical British government cannot pretend that Europe does not exist. The last thousand years of British history are littered with continental entanglements for good reasons of national interest.

Moreover, if the nations of Europe make a historic mistake in attempting to cobble together an undemocratic corporatist superstate then it will certainly end badly, and it is unlikely that the UK would avoid the fallout even though we were on the outside. The only sensible option is for a British government to remain engaged in Europe, while resisting and reversing the federal agenda not just for Britain but for all of Europe. This is the view of the overwhelming majority of the British people, and they are right. It is also the policy of the Conservative Party. Perhaps this is less dramatic than tearing up treaties but it has the virtue of being a credible policy that is saleable at an election.

To summarise, the only thing that checks Labour is fear of losing the next election. William Hague has shifted Conservative policy dramatically on Europe and the Conservatives remain the only credible electoral opposition to Labour. It would be better if non-Conservative sceptics recognised this and gave Mr Hague some credit for it instead of giving comfort to his enemies.

From Jeremy Stanford (eurosccep@dircon.co.uk)

One of my main concerns is assumptions that are made about the electorate. I agree that Conservatives can expect to pick up many more votes at the next election. I disagree that, at the coming election, issues such as House of Lords reform, devolution, non-trial by jury, or wars with Iraq or Serbia will much influence the wider electorate. They may, probably will, strengthen Tory non-voters to return but that's all.

New Labour's elitist attitudes towards traditional socialists concerns will have a greater impact on reducing Labour numbers - these votes might even be picked up by the LibDems.

I agree that "Europe" is becoming a much more significant issue. The polls show this. But these are single issue polls. I don't believe that the electorate at large, at the coming election, will feel so concerned at the impact of a federal EU that it will override their present contentment. This contentment is based on "the economy, stupid" - to repeat a phrase. I would concede, however, that the issues that arise within this year's IGC and how Mr Blair (and Mr Hague) handles them could produce considerable ripples. But, as noted, Mr Blair will

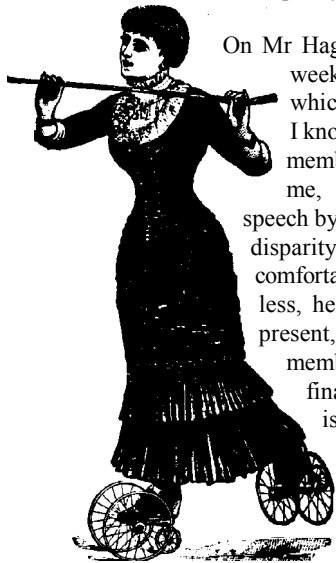
do his utmost to smooth these over.

The proposition made in the *Free Life* article is that Conservative activists need time to replace the present hierarchy with withdrawalists who will defend British sovereignty and possibly reinstate British institutions along lines which existed pre-Blair. While this is 100 per cent what I would like to see personally, I am not convinced that the electorate is in any way ready to vote for this.

There are, foreseeably, only three issues which may affect an election: how much further Mr Blair and cohorts alienate voters by messing up handling state-responsible institutions like the NHS, welfare, schools, police and crime; the hard and negative impact on Britain of EU federalism; and the state of the economy. It is only by overseeing a dramatic downturn in the last that I think Mr Blair becomes really vulnerable. Negative European issues could combine with this to create a hammer blow, but not on their own.

I'm not minimising Britain's alienation with the EU, but looking at the choice they would need to make to elect a different party: a Conservative party. Even if the changes within the Conservative leadership which Sean advocates were made, and even if the EU was seen as becoming far more threatening, Messrs Blair *et al* will have to be seen and felt to be making Britain an uncomfortable place before the electorate will want a sea-change rather than just a slow drift of Blairism into ignominy. Voting for a pro-independence, and libertarian Conservative party (so-called right wing) *would* be such a sea-change. I expect such a change may eventually happen - but when?

I would also expect the Conservative party to adjust its policies if such an opportunity arose. I cannot deny that "the modern Conservative party is built on deception". Major obviously. Now Hague seems to be speaking with two voices. My (optimistic) interpretation is that Mr Hague refuses to be spiked by Blair accusations of isolationism at the next election. If he loses, he wants neither himself, nor the party, to be categorised with the "Michael Foot syndrome". There is simply not the groundswell of opinion to make withdrawal from the EU a "winning" policy for the next election.



On Mr Hague himself, it is said he receives weekly phone calls from Lady Thatcher - which he doesn't have to accept. I think I know what Lady T.'s views are on EU membership (Mr T. has voiced his to me, loudly and confidently, after a speech by herself - and I doubt there is much disparity). Mr Hague presumably feels comfortable with Lady T.'s chats. Nevertheless, he has certainly set himself for the present, unequivocally, on continuing EU membership. I regret this, but issues of financial backers plus a non-"isolationist" position for this next election could well be the overriding cause.

I can only endorse the objective in the article of increasing the power of absolute anti-federalists within the Conservative party. However, I am concerned by the comparison with militants trying to take over the Labour party 20 years ago. I would wish that Conservatives who believe in British sovereignty and independence from the laws of the European federal state do so out of logic and reason, not blind ideology. I would suggest it is only through logic and reason that we can hope to win over the majority electorate. Neither they, nor the influential liberal media, are likely to be attracted to a party 'taken

over' by (inevitably so-called "right-wing, extremist") militants. Or am I being naive about the ways of internal politics?

From Tim Hobson (Tim@tjhobson.demon.co.uk)

This is a well thought out analysis (if a little long) and has the merit that you can express yourself clearly and argue for your point of view logically and without some of the extravagant language and overt prejudice which I see too often. However

Your basic argument (oversimplified) seems to be that:

1) The present Labour government is making a right old mess of things which might just, as the LibDems are no longer in bed with them, allow the Conservatives to win the next election.

2) The Conservatives are nevertheless a bunch of self serving hypocrites who are not to be trusted and, despite what they may say now, would revert to a europhile policy if in power.

3) There is, however, a possibility of right thinking and principled people taking over the Conservative party in some 5 years time because they are unable to prevent the dissemination of information through the Internet.

4) Meanwhile, you would prefer to retain Labour in power because you think they are cooling off on the EU under the pressure of public opinion. And if their damage to democracy, such as trial by jury, is limited to UK legislation it can be undone by a future, and principled, Conservative government after the present leadership has been thrown out.

I do not agree with your conclusion even though parts of the argument may be correct:

1) A lot of Conservative party members are both principled and strongly anti EU. Their pressure has already had the effect of moving the party from just a "wait and see" policy on the euro to one which is almost saying "never, or not for a very long time"; to being strongly critical of all the other EU initiatives which are on the agenda for the next IGC; and to saying they would like to re-negotiate such that our membership is limited to being part of a free market. Your own listing of party candidates is pushing them further down that road.

2) It appears that Labour is trying to soften up the public to accepting much of the EU agenda, in particular QMV in many areas including "freedom, security and justice" which is shorthand for *Corpus Juris*. The BBC, which seems to parrot what the Labour machine tells it, always puts a favourable spin on the EU. There is therefore a real danger that, by the time a Conservative government regains power and tries to re-negotiate, we would be facing a European army and legal system and it would no longer be a question of just one parliament undoing legislation passed by a previous parliament.

3) The Labour party is now nothing like old Labour. It is an assumption which I do not share (the only part of your argument based on supposition alone) that the Conservative party is not equally able to change, and I would argue that it has already largely done so even if it still has further to go.

4) The choice is therefore between voting for a Labour party which we know wants to take us further into Europe; or having a little faith that, just maybe, the Conservative party means what it is saying and would try to at least limit further encroachment on our rights or at best try to re-negotiate which could lead to ultimate withdrawal.

A Plea for the Abolition of Income Tax

Robert Henderson

Income tax on earned income is only honestly paid by those under the Pay as You Earn scheme. Even if they deign to make a tax return, the self-employed can, at worst, reduce their liability very substantially or make it vanish altogether. Of course, many of those not under PAYE do not declare at all. Moreover, many employers collect income tax and national insurance and fail to pay it to the Inland Revenue. Add in the fact that those in control of limited companies - the directors - are able to legally avoid the full burden of PAYE by devices such as share options and national insurance by receiving massive benefits in kind (which do not attract national insurance) and illegally evade by not recording money received on the books, and you should begin to get the unsavoury picture. The rich of course need pay no tax because they can put their capital and income beyond the Tax man in any number of ways, for example off-shore in the manner of Geoffrey Robinson.

Because income tax is only paid in full by those under PAYE, it is far from being a means of redistributing wealth according to income. Rather, it is simply a means of shearing the least mobile taxable sheep.

But the question of whether income tax should continue is not simply a matter of justice. As most of the tax is collected from those under PAYE, it becomes less effective the fewer large employers there are. This is because large employers are generally (1) willing to pay over tax and NI and (2) cheap for the Inland Revenue to administer. The number of large employers is rapidly diminishing. This both increases the cost of tax collection and the frequency of evasion by small companies who can easily evade tax.

How do small companies avoid tax? A favourite trick is to trade for a year or eighteen months without paying over tax of any kind to the state and then liquidate voluntarily. (Creditors other than the state are paid to ensure the continuance of the business under the next company.) A new company is set up on the same day as the other one is liquidated and the business continues as before. So, for example, AB Fashions Ltd liquidates on the 15th March and AB Fashions (New) Ltd begins trading on the same day. A separate company holds any assets such as machinery, so there is nothing for the liquidator to realise. The taxpayer makes up the non-remitted National Insurance payments from the liquidated company by crediting them to the ex-employees. Thus the taxpayer meets the cost of what is essentially theft by the employer. The employers get away with it because non-

payment of tax or NI to the Inland Revenue - as opposed to non-declaration or non-deduction - is a civil not a criminal matter. In short, tax an NI deducted from wages but not paid to the Revenue is simply a debt to the Revenue.

This trick, incredibly, can be done almost *ad infinitum* because the legal restraints, such as banning people from being company directors, are utterly insufficient to stop the practice. Indeed, if a man wishes to engage in criminal activity with little chance of prosecution, he cannot do better than set up a limited company and trade fraudulently. As long as no blatant removal of assets and money occurs, prosecution can normally be avoided provided the principals of the company keep reciting such time honoured phrases "I thought trade would improve" and "I was out of my depth". If all else fails, lose the records or claim that they were never kept.

There is also a general reason why income tax should be abolished. It allows the most general means for the state to probe into the lives of individuals.

There is a simple answer to the unfairness of income tax and the growing inability to identify PAYE payers: abolish it and substitute a national insurance system, operated on a proper actuarial basis, to cover health and unemployment. Those unable to pay premiums would have to be given credits by the state.

Pensions are more problematical because of the period over which contributions must be made - anyone who believes that a pension can be guaranteed over a period of 40 odd years is living in cloud cuckoo land. Even if payments towards a non-state pension were made compulsory, it is all too easy to see situations where large numbers of people would be left with pensions insufficient to keep body or soul together or no pensions at all - remember Maxwell. Therefore, I cannot foresee a time when the state should not be the provider of the last resort. Such pensions need to be funded out of general taxation. I think that is the best balance one can get between freedom and the compassionate treatment of others.

To keep costs under control, the new system should be restricted to British citizens.

No Harm in Asking, is There?

Helen Szamuely

You would think that those who support Britain's membership in the European Union and tell us that the benefits are great and self-evident, would be only too pleased to be given an opportunity to explain to us lesser mortals what these are. You would further think that if a noble lord helpfully introduced a Bill that required Her Majesty's Government to set up a balanced committee to examine what we are told on very good authority is not on the agenda: the costs and benefits of Britain's withdrawal from the EU, these people would be overjoyed. At last, they would say, here is an opportunity for us to prove all those nasty euro-sceptics wrong. Not so, but far from it. During the second

reading of Lord Pearson's Bill that was introduced to set up just such a committee euophile after euophile stood up and denounced the very idea of withdrawing, first assuring everyone that this was not on the agenda, was a complete myth and existed as a possibility only in the overwrought imagination of the eurosceptics. But the question was not whether we should withdraw but whether we should have a committee of inquiry to look into the pros and cons. One can only surmise that all these people - and a good number appeared to be Liberal-Democrats - assumed that such a committee can come up with only one answer: that we should withdraw. But if they believe that, why do they keep

telling us that staying in is such a wonderful idea? Perhaps, as the noble Lord Pearson said in his summing up:

If the noble Baroness [Scotland] does not want to support the Bill and if other noble Lords do not want to support it, then I think they are running away from an inquiry and what the result might be. I would just say to them 'Cowardly, cowardly, custard!'

One or two interesting things came out of the debate. There was the usual argument about trade figures, though the europhiles were, I thought, a little mealy-mouthed about it all. The only two businessmen whose opinions they could bring up in their support were Niall Fitzgerald, who heads an Anglo-Dutch conglomerate that for some reason keeps investing outside the EU and James Dyson, who, having made his pro-euro statement, took his money to the Far East. Not good, I'd say.

Then there was the usual palaver about what people voted for in 1975. (In parenthesis, I may declare my interest in that I cannot understand how anybody could have believed that the Common Market was just that or that the Prime Minister - any Prime Minister - was telling the truth. I can, however, understand how fear of the Soviet Union and of various internal forces may have inspired people to vote yes in 1975.)

In general we were treated to a great deal of well-meaning hot air from the europhiles. Apparently, the East European countries were motivated solely by a desire to join the EU when they overthrew the Communist system. This touching belief contradicts every statement even the staunchest supporters of accession in those countries make. They do keep insisting that they did not regain their sovereignty in order to give it up again. The problem is that, just like our own politicians, they seem to think that there is a choice in the matter.

Of the many fine speeches, Lord Monson's was of particular interest. He nailed two myths. Portugal, he said, overthrew its authoritarian government, because the people "were fed up with paying the massive costs of the wars in Angola and Mozambique". "Similarly," - he added, - "Spain did not get rid of Franco over a longer period of time

If you like *Free Life*, you might also like another journal of libertarian thought called

The Individual

Edited by Paul Anderton and published by the
Society for Individual Freedom,
104 Drive Mansions, London SE16 4JH

Tel: 0171 371 7530

specifically because it wanted to join the EU." He ought to have added that Spain did not get rid of Franco at all - he died and with him died his system. The EU had precious little to do with it just as it had precious little to do with the collapse of Communism. Where it did interfere, in the tottering Yugoslavia in the early nineties, its actions had the most baneful results.

One more point from Lord Monson, on the subject of the CAP:

France's hidden agenda was to prevent its millions of peasant farmers becoming impoverished and bankrupt, being driven off their small holdings and drifting, destitute and embittered, into the large cities, where they would have been easy recruits for the Communist Party, which at that time was extremely successful, attracting almost 40 per cent of the French vote. In that objective the CAP was extremely successful. About 83 per cent of French farmers have indeed left the land, but they have done so over a 40-year period, giving plenty of time for those dispossessed to find jobs elsewhere. Meanwhile, the Communist vote in France was successfully contained.

Indirectly that may be a benefit to this country as well, but for some reason, it was not claimed as such by the Liberal Democrats.

A Manifesto for London

Peter Tatchell

I resigned from the Labour Party in February 2000- after 22 years membership - in protest at the rigging of the Labour mayoral selection contest. Ken Livingstone was robbed.

I know how Ken feels. I was also rejected by Labour. Although democratically selected as the Labour candidate for Bermondsey in 1981, party bosses banned me for over a year. When I eventually fought the by-election in 1983, Labour headquarters gave me minimal support.

Now I want another chance. My pledge is this: I will fight for a fair deal for all Londoners. Better transport, health-care, education and housing. Action against unemployment, crime, pollution and discrimination.

Standing as an Independent means I don't have to toe a party line. I can put the interests of Londoners first. Everyone knows that I'm no pushover. When something needs to be done, I refuse to take "no" for an answer. That's what we need to get London back on track: someone who will fight London's corner and stand up to the government when they get it wrong.

The London Assembly has huge potential to promote social justice, democratic participation and human rights for all Londoners. I want to help make that happen. I am asking for your support this coming 4th May.

My Manifesto for London

Keep Public Transport Public

- * Four year fares freeze on tubes and buses
- * No tube privatisation
- * Rail safety to be enforced by a watchdog independent of Railtrack and Transport for London
- * Conductors on the buses to cut journey times and improve passenger security
- * Extend tube and bus services to 3am
- * Fund improved public transport through bonds, congestion charges for cars in central London, and a tax on company car-parking spaces
- * Make the River Thames the 14th "tube" line - with high-speed, four-stop hovercraft/hydrofoil commuter river buses between Embankment and Richmond in the west and Greenwich in the east

- * A river bus terminal adjacent to Embankment tube, with airport-style lounges, shops and cafes
- * Two new tram links - from Dulwich to Waterloo, and Streatham to Victoria - to cover those parts of south London without tube stations

Reclaim the Streets

- * Close local high streets to traffic to create a network of urban villages all over London
- * Make Sunday a no-car day in the West End
- * Grass-over Victoria Embankment between Westminster and Waterloo Bridges to create the London Sculpture Garden - an open-air exhibition of 150 sculptures, rotating annually
- * Link up parks, squares, canal banks and river walks to establish pedestrian and cycle routes criss-crossing London
- * Sylvia Pankhurst Parkway - a three mile ribbon of parkland connecting St James's Park with Green Park, Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens to create a continuous car-free walking and cycling route from Whitehall to Kensington High Street and Notting Hill Gate (achieved by excluding cars from Horse Guards Road, The Mall and South Carriage and West Carriage Drives, and by sinking the roads at Hyde Park Corner into a cutting and building a land causeway over them)

Green the City

- * Transform the capital into a Garden City by planting a million new trees to cut pollution and visually-enhance the environment
- * Tough new controls to upgrade air and water quality, and curb noise emissions
- * Convert Greater London Authority (GLA) vehicles and Transport for London buses to hydrogen, gas and electric power to cut fumes and toxic waste
- * Promote renewable energy with an avenue of power-generating windmills on the forecourt of the GLA headquarters, and by cladding the building with solar power photo-voltaic panels
- * An Environment Commissioner to coordinate the Green the City programme

Save Our NHS

- * Press the government for more NHS hospital beds, doctors, nurses and specialists
- * Reopen local Accident & Emergency departments
- * Switch the emphasis to preventive health-care to stop people getting sick in the first place
- * A London-wide agency to integrate and coordinate HIV prevention campaigns and support services
- * Campaign for the legalised medical use of marijuana, and for a Royal Commission to consider the pros and cons of decriminalising recreational drugs
- * As a condition of licensing, require all bars and clubs to provide condom vending machines and display safer sex information
- * A Health Commissioner to promote a programme of Health for London, with a focus on sickness prevention

Affordable Housing for All

- * Support a four year rents freeze
- * Register all empty property and establish a fast-track allocations system to get unlet homes occupied
- * Set up an internet-based, London-wide scheme to enable council tenants to organise their own flat swaps with other council tenants in any part of London
- * Promote the mass build of low-cost, high-quality, environment-friendly, crime-resistant housing to stop Londoners being priced out of living here

- * Repopulate the West End and City of London through new housing schemes to create safer, integrated living and working communities

Action on Poverty and Low Pay

- * A minimum wage of £4.50 an hour payable by all Greater London Authority (GLA) controlled bodies and by all companies that do business with the GLA (which would put an extra £30 a week into the pockets of the lowest paid)
- * An Urban Regeneration Commissioner to tackle inner-city poverty
- * Oblige all GLA suppliers and service providers to guarantee high standards of health and safety and environmental protection

Policing Without Prejudice

- * Action to root out police corruption, racism, homophobia and all forms of prejudice, in order to restore public confidence and respect
- * Crack down on hate crimes to protect the black and gay communities
- * Make prejudice and discrimination by officers an explicit offence under the police disciplinary code

Crime Busting - Safer Homes, Safer Streets

- * Protect the public by ensuring that every neighbourhood has its own designated police officer with responsibility for community liaison, crime prevention and victim support
- * Enable the police to concentrate on fighting serious crime through the creation of a new London Patrol Service, which would take over routine police duties - such as traffic management, the notification of highway repairs, home security advice, and street patrols to deter and report crime

Equality and Respect

- * Strong representation for women and black people in the Greater London Authority (GLA) administration
- * Free nursery education places for all 2 to 5 year olds, and free after-school clubs for pupils of all ages
- * Disabled access to public transport and buildings
- * Recognition and rights for unwed couples - gay and straight - through a GLA Domestic Partnership Register
- * An action programme to stamp out racist and homophobic bullying in schools
- * Comprehensive equal opportunities and non-discrimination by the GLA and GLA-controlled bodies
- * Contract compliance to require firms doing business with the GLA to guarantee equal opportunities to all their employees and customers - including spousal benefits for couples on the GLA Domestic Partnership Register

Jobs for London

- * Restructure business rates to raise the tax paid by big companies and lower the tax burden on smaller ones, in order to encourage enterprise and the growth of small businesses - thereby enabling them to take on more employees
- * The transformation of London's education and economic systems to create new knowledge-based, socially-enhancing, ecologically-sustainable jobs of the future

Capital of Culture and Sport

- * Free summer art exhibitions and music concerts in Hyde Park
- * London on Ice - close The Mall to traffic and transform the former roadway into a long lake which would, in winter, be frozen artificially to create the world's biggest, free open-air ice rink
- * London Games - every two years - to promote sporting achievement

* Expand and develop London's community-based festivals, such as the Notting Hill Carnival and Pride/Mardi Gras, into major international cultural events

* Sponsor an annual St Patrick's Day Parade in London

London Lottery

* A London lottery to fund new lost-cost housing, free nursery education and after-school clubs, improved public transport, and the greening of the environment

* Alternative or additional funding for these Greater London Authority (GLA) projects could be derived from:

- + Tourist tax - £2 a night on occupied hotel beds
- + Congestion charges - £5 a day for cars to enter central London
- + Company car-parking space levy of £1,500 a year

Participation and Democracy

* Live internet coverage of all Greater London Authority (GLA) proceedings

* Community Forums on issues of concern to Londoners, where the public can quiz the Mayor and Assembly members and propose new policy ideas

* Direct input for community groups into the GLA's decision-making

process

How You Can Help the Campaign

The "Tatchell for London Assembly" campaign has no party machine, and hardly any resources. Peter is dependent on people like you. These are ways you can help:

- Join our "chain campaign". Persuade five friends to vote for Peter. Get them to persuade five of their friends, and so on.
- Make a personal donation. Send your cheque, payable to "Tatchell for London", to: Tatchell for London, Swiss Centre, 10 Wardour Street, London W1V 3HG. Then organise a whip around among your friends and work colleagues.
- Write letters of support to local and national newspapers, and call up radio phone-in programmes - tell them why you're backing Tatchell for London.
- Get Peter invited to speak at local election meetings in your area.

More information

info@tatchellforlondon.freemove.co.uk

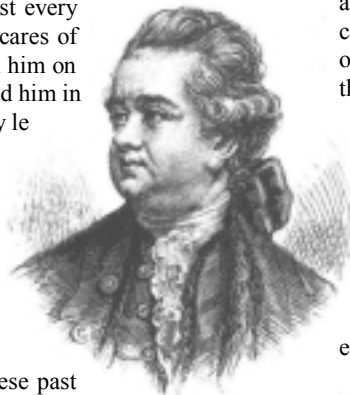
<http://www.tatchellforlondon.freemove.co.uk>

Editorial Jottings

One

It may have been observed that no issue of *Free Life* appeared between last October and January. The blame for this lapse is entirely mine, but the reason is Edward Gibbon. I opened the first volume of his *Decline and Fall* one Sunday afternoon in September, and closed the last volume early in December. During this time, almost every moment not reserved to earning a living or to the cares of married life was given up to reading Gibbon. I read him on railway trains and in the gaps between lectures. I read him in bed and once very furtively in the Church of St Mary le Bow. I read him sometimes with enthusiasm and sometimes with helpless envy. I read him sometimes with impatience. But always I read him in the knowledge that he was the greatest of English historians, and one of the four or five greatest of all historians, and easily one of the greatest of all English writers.

I cannot understand the belief, generally shared these past two centuries, that the golden age of English literature lay in the century before the Civil War. I accept the *Prayer Book* and the *English Bible* as works of genius that will be appreciated so long as our language survives. I admire the *Essays* of Francis Bacon and one or two lyrics. But I do not at all regard Shakespeare as a great writer. His plays are ill-organised, his style barbarous where not pedantic. I am astonished how pieces like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet*, with their long, ranting monologues, can be thought equal to the greatest products of the Athenian theatre. I grant that *Julius Caesar* is a fine play - but only because Shakespeare stayed close to his ancient sources for the plot, and wrote in an uncharacteristically plain style. Perhaps I am undeveloped in some critical faculty; and I know that people whose judgements I trust have thought better of him. But I cannot see Shakespeare as a great writer or his age as the greatest in our literature.



For me, the golden age begins with Dryden and Congreve, and continues into the 18th century with Pope, Swift and Addison. It holds up until nearly the end of that century, after when there is a gentle decline towards the murkier style of the Victorians.

The strengths of the Augustans were clarity and balance in their writing, and in the thought that this reflected a strong regard for truth and a dislike of enthusiasm. In Gibbon, these virtues are carried about as far as they can go. Granted, his style is often rather feline. Granted, he generally insinuates his theological views where he dares not assert them.

Granted, his footnotes are littered with the most comic vanity that any historian ever displayed; and his readers are always aware of M. Pomme de Terre wandering up and down his study in his club wig and coat, composing those matchless sentences, and every so often glancing lovingly up at the portrait of himself hung just above the fireplace. But what matchless sentences they are, and how devastating they can be in the cause of enlightenment and humanity.

Take, for example, a passage from one of the later and so less frequented chapters - No 51. The Arabs are said to have burned the Alexandrian Library on their conquest of Egypt - claiming that either its contents agreed with *The Koran*, and so were superfluous, or they contradicted it, in which case they were blasphemous. Gibbon doubts the testimony of the first historian to have mentioned the event. He continues in his smoothest and most reasonable manner:

The rigid sentence of Omar is repugnant to the sound and orthodox precept of the Mahometan casuists; they expressly declare, that the religious books of the Jews and Christians, which are acquired by the right of war, should never be committed to the flames; and that the works of profane science, historians or poets, physicians or philosophers, may be lawfully applied to the use of the faithful. A more destructive zeal may perhaps be attributed to the first successors of Mahomet; yet in this instance, the conflagration would have speedily expired in the deficiency of materials. I should not recapitulate the

disasters of the Alexandrian library, the involuntary flame that was kindled by Caesar in his own defence, or the mischievous bigotry of the Christians, who studied to destroy the monuments of idolatry. But if we gradually descend from the age of the Antonines to that of Theodosius, we shall learn from a chain of contemporary witnesses, that the royal palace and the temple of Serapis no longer contained the four, or the seven, hundred thousand volumes, which had been assembled by the curiosity and magnificence of the Ptolemies.

Then comes the flash of steel:

Perhaps the church and seat of the patriarchs might be enriched with a repository of books; but if the ponderous mass of Arian and Monophysite controversy were indeed consumed in the public baths, a philosopher may allow, with a smile, that it was ultimately devoted to the benefit of mankind.

I first read this passage in 1987, lying on my bed at about three in the morning. I nearly cried with laughter then, and I still laugh as I transcribe the sentence. One needs to know about the disputes over the nature of Christ that disgrace the Church between the reigns of Constantine and Justinian, to appreciate the full weight of Gibbon's scorn; but the contrast between "library" and "repository of books", between "patriarch" and "philosopher", and the descent of time from the Antonines to Theodosius, tells us all that needs to be known of what he thought about Christianity.

As said, this was not my first meeting with Gibbon. I was twelve when I found him in the abridgement by D.M. Low. As an undergraduate, I made use of him in the J.B. Bury edition up till the reign of Heraclius and the Arab conquests. In my late twenties, I went through him again in a desultory manner, skipping chapters that did not interest me. But it was only last year that I read him in the full and proper order, from the military resources of the Antonines to the revival of Rome under the Renaissance Popes - one and a half million words of the only historical work in English still to be in print and read and appreciated after two centuries. I commend him to the readers of *Free Life*. Indeed, I may even review him in full for the next issue. I do not agree entirely with his judgement on Christianity or on the Byzantine Empire; and I am at work on a long article about the demographic and political consequences of the Great Plague of 542, the extent of which Gibbon describes without being able to appreciate. For the moment, however, I am hurrying to get this issue written, so that Mr Tatchell's manifesto can be made public, and so must leave Gibbon to another time.

Two

Last December, I was invited to the Adam Smith Institute Christmas party. As ever, this was an enjoyable event, giving me the chance to catch up with friends and acquaintances I had not seen as much as I wanted during the previous year. The room was very crowded, with more people coming in until perhaps midway through the evening; and moving round was not at all easy. Even so, I found David Marsland, and was soon exchanging news and gossip.

After a few minutes of this, however, there was one of those odd collective shudders that turns a crowd momentarily fluid in ways that none of the individuals comprising it either wants or understands. I was torn away from Dr Marsland. John Hibbs was hurried past me in the other direction with barely time to smile and begin a greeting. When the crowd solidified again, I found myself opposite an old man in a suit so shabby that he could only have been a politician. Though he had no name badge - the ASI is keen to avoid the formalities of introduction and the frequent embarrassments of its absence - and though his face had aged and turned grey since his days of greatness, I finally recognised the old man as Michael Howard. That is, he was Home Secretary under John Major, and as such was the worst holder of that office between its establishment in 1782 till the appointment

after him of the still worse Jack Straw.

I rather think he might now be *Sir* Michael Howard. But since I do not care to recognise any honour granted on the motion of Tony Blair, I will refer to him as plain *Mr* Howard - which is far more than he deserves.

"Who are you, then?" Mr Howard asked with a simper half shy half slimy. He looked at my own name badge and grunted: "Oh, Libertarian Alliance".

I resisted the urge to say exactly what I thought of him. My readers may recall the horrid things I said about him during the middle 1990s in these pages - about his abolition of the right to silence, his asset confiscation laws, his proposals for identity cards and limitations of the right to Trial by Jury. But I was guest; and much as Madsen Pirie might agree with my sentiments, I felt a duty not to upset one of his guests. So I said in as neutral a tone as I could manage:

"The Libertarian Alliance was not among your greatest fans when you were in the last Government."

Suddenly, Mr Howard smiled. "But I'm as much a libertarian as you are. I believe passionately in the right of ordinary people to walk the streets in safety."

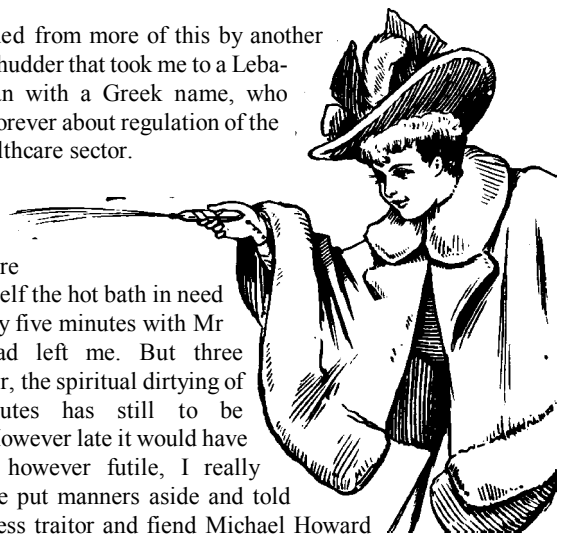
I dug my fingernails into my palms. Stopping street crime does not need the establishing of a police state, complete with intrusive surveillance of people in their homes on the verbal permit of a police officer. All that needs is to let people defend themselves effectively when attacked, and to impose real punishments on real criminals convicted by due process of law - for neither of which Mr Howard showed the least enthusiasm in office. But I was resolved on politeness, so I changed the subject.

"I must congratulate you on your disapproval of the Serbian War last spring" I said. But the smile grew wider, and Mr Howard's face settled into the oily smugness I remember from so many speeches to Party Conference.

"You surely mistake me" he cried. "I was absolutely in favour of the war to relieve the suffering people of Kosovo. If I had any criticism, it purely concerned the Government's half-hearted execution of the war."

I was rescued from more of this by another collective shudder that took me to a Lebanese woman with a Greek name, who prosed on forever about regulation of the private healthcare sector.

When I got home, I made sure to give myself the hot bath in need of which my five minutes with Mr Howard had left me. But three months later, the spiritual dirtying of those minutes has still to be cleansed. However late it would have been, and however futile, I really should have put manners aside and told the shameless traitor and fiend Michael Howard what I thought of him. Instead of holding them back, I should have let the words out in one vast, burning gush. At the very least, I might have put him off the *canapés*.



Three

With Mrs Gabb, I went to the pictures last week, to see *Topsy Turvy*. This film covers the year in the lives of Gilbert and Sullivan between the opening of *Princess Ida* and of *The Mikado*. It was an astonishingly good film. The performances were wholly convincing. The actors who played Gilbert and Sullivan brought them to life as I have never seen done in other biographical films. The actors who played singers could sing, and those who played musicians could play them instruments. Moreover, the background was properly drawn. Late Victorian England was revealed to us - not in the BBC sense of street scenes and hansom cabs, but in the sense that I could think the cinema screen a window into another world.

And what a splendid world it was. It had elegance and manliness and

multiple drug abuse - that is, all the things one might expect to find in a free society. The dentists would disappoint me; but a few rotten teeth might be a price worth paying for the right to jump through that cinema screen and seek asylum in a freer and therefore a better world.

Then there were the performances of the works. When I was a boy in the 1970s, I went to dozens of performances by the D'Oyley Carte Opera Company. With the exception of a *Yeoman of the Guard* from late 1975, these were awful. The orchestra played badly - and played too fast in an effort to cover the bad notes. The performers were obviously bored with what they were doing. The sets and costumes had all seen better days. There were gramophone records that showed how the operas should sound; but I never saw reason to respect their appearance on stage. *Topsy Turvy* has recreations of how Gilbert wanted them to appear, and most impressive it was. I hope someone will now try for a proper staging of at least *The Mikado*.

Letters to the Editor

Sir,

In his "final Jottings" (*Free Life* No. 34, September/ October 1999), Brian Micklethwait issues the command: "Consider that awful perpetration of one of Margaret Thatcher's speech writers: 'There is no such thing as society'". He himself insists: "Yes, there is".

I wish that, before launching his offensive against that utterance, he had first taken the trouble to examine its context. Had he done so, he would have discovered that it was not precomposed by a speech writer but spontaneously uttered by the lady herself, in an interview, published in *Woman's Own* on the 13th October 1989. What she actually said was: "I don't believe in society. There is no such thing, only individual people, and there are families".

The most appropriate comment was provided by Marx and Engels in *The Holy Family*:

History does *nothing*, it does *not* possess immense riches, it does *not* fight battles. It is *men*, real living men, who do all this, who possess things and fight battles. It is not 'history' which uses men as a means of achieving - as if it were an individual person - *its own ends*. History is nothing but the activity of men in pursuit of their ends. (Vol IV, p.43 of the *Collected Works* - emphasis original)

Yours sincerely,

Antony Flew
Reading

Sir,

I believe the occasion of the friendly quarrel between Brian Micklethwait and yourself hinges on a lack of precision about who exactly is evil ("Sean Gabb, Brian Micklethwait and the Debate over Libertarian Strategy", *Free Life* No. 34, September/ October 1999).

Your remarks, which rely on the understanding that politicians are self-interested and will necessarily do what they can to increase the revenue and power accruing to their offices, is appealing, especially to me, who am being trained as a professional political scientist.

Mr Micklethwait makes the plausible rejoinder that ordinary people are not evil: they are just befuddled and (rationally) ignorant, another argument appealing to the political scientist. We cannot decry all citizen supporters of the invasion of Yugoslavia, for example, as

bloodthirsty fascists: they know not what they do. On the other hand, the leaders of states know very well what they do, and they do what they do for reasons.

What does this understanding imply with regard to libertarian strategy? I believe it means that education is important, as Mr Micklethwait argues, for "the common man". They are open to persuasion. It is equally true, however, that the leading officers of the state are not open to persuasion. Monkey-wrenching and subversion are therefore also necessities.

Regards,
Jason P. Sorens
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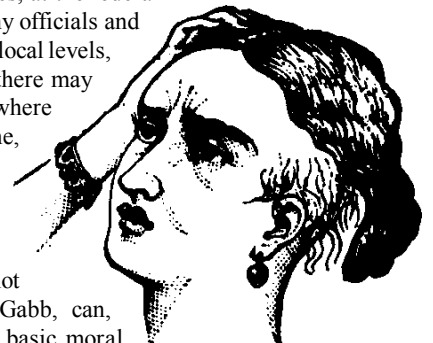
Sir,

I write regarding your article "Sean Gabb, Brian Micklethwait and the Debate over Libertarian Strategy" (*Free Life* No. 34, September/ October 1999). I wish that Brian Micklethwait's approach would work, but it won't.

In the first place, those in power have no reason to debate him; his status is nowhere near theirs. Secondly, were he to be able to talk with them in public, they would not change their minds; they would merely protect their histories. Third, were he to meet them in private, and even miraculously find them intellectually honest, they would still not change their public actions, as their continuance in power demands that they act as they do. (As you say, their loyalty is to that power and nothing else.)

I believe your opinion of officials and bureaucrats is wholly valid, at least in the United States, at the federal level. (We have so many officials and bureaucrats at state and local levels, that I am hopeful that there may be a virtuous man somewhere among them. I found one, once; but I feared what exposing him might do, so I never told anyone.)

Unfortunately, I do not believe that you, Dr Gabb, can, without their having a basic moral



foundation, sway public opinion, either. It is easy enough to incite crowds to topple statuary (or even governments); it is impossible to erect a government upon the ruins of the old, without believing oneself of a superior nature, and thus above common peoples' laws. When you thus establish yourself as leader, you are faced with the problem of imposing your plan on others, or gathering enough support for individual freedom to encourage everyone to try it. If you try to establish the primacy of individual rights as a basic tenet, those raised on the socialist teat will call for your head, establish a democracy, and tyrannize the minorities; and today, in both Great Britain and the United States, most people believe that the only milk available is someone else's, which they who have it must have gotten through their exploitation of the little people. (Strangely, "public servants" are looked upon with awe and admiration when they become wealthy in their government positions.)

Watching the Clintons, I understand clearly how Hitler sold out his people: they wanted him to do it. His view of his own superiority and his view of the absolute perfection of his plan allowed him to be entirely feckless in that plan's execution. Any means were justified. The people praised him and obeyed him, as long as their plates were full. (Men in prison are generally docile, too - as long as their plates are full.)

"The purpose of government is to decide who gets what." When that is its purpose, the governed are destroyed. They will destroy themselves, whenever the government gets big enough to fulfil wishes. They will insist that government be big enough to do its job of redistribution, and they will see that the job gets done, and they will rein themselves, while trying to rob their neighbours.

Tim Kern (former economics and US government teacher)
Tulsa, Oklahoma, USA
Radiotimk@aol.com

Sir,

I write regarding your article "Sean Gabb, Brian Micklethwait and the Debate over Libertarian Strategy" (*Free Life* No. 34, September/October 1999). Wonderful. You have persuaded me. I must admit that I've been suffering under the illusions of options one and four. I should have know better, having been around politics and those power hungry apparatchiks all my life. My father was a politician at the state level. I used to play with toy cars in the floor of George Wallace's office while my Dad discussed statecraft with the Gov.

Looking back shamefully on the time I spent working within the Republican Party, you are totally right about a complete absence of ideas in comparison to the raw heady atmosphere of power politics. It's actually so bad that being called an idealist is one of the worst appraisals a politician can get from Big Media.

I will remain in the Libertarian Party, however, because I like to do stuff -- knowing full well that it is mostly fruitless. Here's a happy note for you: those empty headed power moths have started showing up in the Libertarian Party as we have become more successful.

Liberty,

Jim Albea
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Sir,

I read your commentary on the Gary Glitter trial with interest ("Reflections on the Gary Glitter Case", *Free Life* No. 35, January 2000). I do not agree with your conclusions, nor do I agree that possession of indecent pictures of children is a victimless crime.

Possession of pornographic images of persons over the age of 16, i.e. adults for these purposes, in the ordinary course of events involves no harm to anyone. An adult is capable of consenting meaningfully and therefore in the vast majority of cases the model poses willingly and of his or her own free will.

With minors, however, it is different. I understand you to agree that there should be an age of consent. My own belief is that 16 is probably right do not accept that children are capable of consenting freely to being the object of indecent photography.

My view is that the taking of a pornographic picture involves the infliction of harm on a child, be it immediate physical or longer term emotional injury. Therefore to say that Gary Glitter's actions harmed no one is a bit like trying to argue that receiving stolen goods is a victimless crime. The circumstances in which a picture is taken may therefore be highly relevant to the assessment of whether possession can be said to constitute harm. If Mr Glitter downloaded pictures from paying commercial sites, then is it not a valid argument to say that the main purpose in taking the pictures was commercial gain?

Suppose then, for argument's sake that the number of people willing to pay for such images dropped significantly and the number of pornographic images of people too young to consent meaningfully declined as a consequence, would it then not be reasonable to argue that as non-possession involved the infliction of less harm, then possession involving more harm should be proscribed?

Suppose again that a member of your family or a close friend was murdered. Suppose then that photos of the corpse of that loved one were distributed on the World Wide Web on a pay for access site, then how would you feel? Suppose then it transpired that some unscrupulous persons were actually having people done to death for the purposes of entertainment and profiting from sickoes willing to pay to amass photos of the corpses of murdered people, would it then be a valid excuse to say, "Oh well, I only paid for these photos. My acquiring them and possessing them doesn't involve anyone's rights being violated"?

I will readily concede that my visceral disgust for what Gary Glitter was doing influences my views. By all accounts these were not photos of young ladies in schoolgirl outfits but involved what were unambiguously very young children.

Does my less than perfect critique of your argument on the grounds of "consent" and the apparent lack thereof in what I consider to be meaningful terms undermine the basic proposition that what Gary Glitter appears to have done should remain criminal? I think not. Of course there is a very powerful taboo against indecent behaviour between adults and minors and I see no reason why that should change. I would venture to say that it is probably a well-nigh universal taboo in all civilised societies. What is the derivation of the very concept of rights? Are they founded in nature, reason or custom? Are they universal, or timeless? Or do they arise from practice, emotion, prejudice (in the Burkean sense) or a combination of these?

Perhaps they are a civilisational result or achievement, as I recall Oakeshott argued. Can it then not be said that our very beliefs as to the existence of certain human rights rest on certain taboos, or assumptions that most people may not find easy to articulate in rationalistic terms. but are views which ultimately rest on the proposition that "Well, you know, it's just plain darn wrong!"

What this means therefore is that conventional "rights" and "harm" analysis may not be a closed system.

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Reviews

Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind

David Cesarani

William Heinemann, London, 1998, 646 pp, £25 (hbk)
(ISBN 0 434 11305)

Isaiah Berlin: A Life

Michael Ignatieff

Chatto and Windus, London, 1998, 356pp, £20
(ISBN 0 7011 6325 9)

It is interesting that these two biographies should have appeared at a similar time. Each concerns a writer with some call on our attention, Arthur Koestler, the fierce freelance enemy of the Nazis and Communists and Isaiah Berlin, the urbane, patrician aesthete from All Souls. They knew each other too, as their biographers make clear. Koestler found Berlin too "donnish" and would certainly have viewed him as insufficiently anticommunist; and Berlin did not like Koestler's effective abandonment of his Jewish heritage. It is impossible, in any case, to imagine their being very close friends. The hard-drinking, macho, promiscuous Koestler and the reticent and fastidious Berlin would surely have jarred on each other in a very short time.

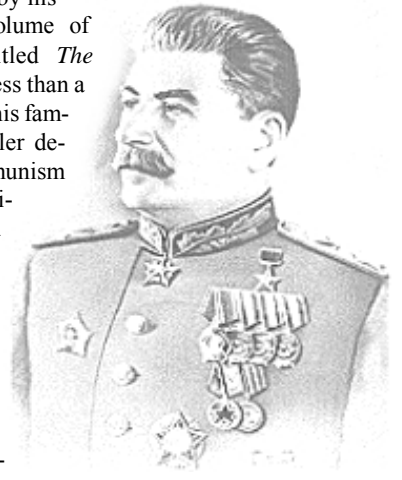
That their personalities were so different might perhaps not have mattered particularly. They might still have been drawn to each other spasmodically. The extrovert Koestler was very friendly with the preternaturally private and shy Orwell. Koestler was always drawn to people with distinctive characters, whether that distinction was based on power, wealth or fame. He often associated with people whose views he detested, provided they had some marks of distinction. Sartre was one such, and the dreadful A.J. Ayer another. Indeed Koestler had that sort of *parvenu* inferiority complex which drew him to people he thought socially superior even if he despised them intellectually. While he and Berlin could never have become intimate, he would have undoubtedly seen the latter as socially distinguished. Koestler with his horrendous Middle European accent would, for example, have been much impressed with Berlin's mastery of upper class English dialect and speech conventions.

Moreover much united these two men. Both were immigrants to this country, both were more or less Anglophile. Both were famous, both were Jewish, both were multilingual and prodigiously talented. Yet Koestler has always lit my intellectual candle as effectively as Berlin and his various concepts of liberty and his evocations of German romanticism have not. It is hard to put one's finger precisely on the reason. As Mr Ignatieff makes clear, in an indifferent text, though better written than Dr Cesarani's, there were extraordinary events in Berlin's life too. Who else at the height of Stalin's power was in Russia, to meet Pasternak and Anna Akhmatova? Who else could claim to have been confused with another I. Berlin, greater indeed I opine than he, the American songwriter? For most of his life Berlin knew everyone who was anyone in British intellectual and artistic circles.

Why then does Koestler so fascinate and Berlin so weary the spirit? Their biographies changed nothing for me. Dr Cesarani writes very badly, a manifest victim of the bad English teaching which hit our schools in the 1960s. Worse, his biographical judgement is poor. He wants to define Koestler by his Jewishness. This simply will not do. Koestler remained a central European Jew to the end. But we must take a writer's word for it when he or she says something serious. Koestler said for forty years that the concept of Jewishness was anthropologically and historically meaningless and mischievous. This is nonsense; but it is what he believed. At the very least, however, it

should make us look further than mere extrapolations from the little Jewish boy from Budapest, which is the rôle in which Dr Cesarani casts him.

In fact Koestler is defined by his anticommunism. In the volume of superb autobiography entitled *The Invisible Writing*, in 1953, less than a decade after losing much of his family in the Holocaust, Koestler declared roundly that Communism was the most inhuman political system ever devised and the greatest threat to our civilisation that had ever existed. Everyone is against Nazism. It goes with being human. Koestler thought that Communism was just as hateful or worse, and found it intolerable that all intellectuals did not excoriate the Communist menace.



Koestler stands alongside Orwell as the greatest of the anticommunists. That is how history will remember him. By contrast one would have to ask of Berlin's shade: just what was his problem? Nothing stands out in Mr Ignatieff's book, though the sections on Russia are the most memorable, suggesting genuine pity and love on Berlin's part.

There are other things. There is Koestler's superlatively imaginative prose-writing. His combination of literary talent, especially his flair for metaphor, and his unusual scientific knowledge, gave Koestler powers of prose-writing beyond those of anyone else in that brilliant emigration from central Europe which marked the middle years of the last century. Popper, Hayek, Polanyi, Mannheim, Kolakowski - none of these could write like Koestler. By contrast Berlin's soothing and elegant prose rolls effortlessly off the page and equally painlessly out of the mind. Is this because he had no central problem? Was Maurice Cowling's obituary remark that Berlin wrote no big book because there was not one in him, a correct judgement?

Maybe the difference between these two men is spiritual. When it comes to moral issues, we know little about Berlin and it is even conceivable that there is not much to know. He thought our condition ineradicably ambiguous morally, split as we are between incommensurable choices. Mr Ignatieff makes it clear that this was a private, careful man, one not very active sexually. In the general moral and intellectual sense he has great admirers, like John Gray, who was a friend. Equally I have known people at All Souls who detested him. For those like me with no personal experience, it is hard to come to a decision. Mr Ignatieff's glossy book does not help.

We have to use the word spiritual again. Dr Cesarani shows effortlessly enough what a shit Koestler was. He was a lecher, even a rapist, according to his biographer. He seems to have forced at least one girlfriend into an abortion, which sits badly with the man who always claimed that the mechanistic aspects of the Enlightenment were unacceptable to him, that the nature of things is written in an invisible writing of which in rare moments of grace we are vouchsafed a glimpse. He dismissed Judaism, unfairly, as mostly just a set of archaic dietary laws; and he was too proud to see that Christianity was

the true answer for his restless genius and troubled soul.

What by contrast can we say of Berlin? Mr Ignatieff shows him as in a quandary when his beloved father was worrying that death might be the end of life. His son held precisely that belief. Mr Ignatieff says that Berlin hated the callow anticlericalism of the Voltarian Enlightenment. Why then did he come across so often as an Enlightenment sceptic. In one television interview I saw soon after his death, he said that he saw no evidence that God exists. That sounds pretty definite to me. Give me the suicide and the lecher rather than the polite sophisticate articulating his nihilism on the edge of the grave. Some will call it brave. It certainly recalls the Roman patricians. Asking for trouble is what I call it. Koestler was a sentimental rogue, who spent years of his life in the wastes of parapsychology. Fortunately these will not cancel out his superb contribution to the theory of despotism and his ingenious writings in the philosophy of science. In any case, at least he had the merit of recognising a mystery when he saw one. In this matter at least the rogue has it over the patrician every time.

Dennis O’Keeffe

Political Correctness and Public Finance

Dennis O’Keeffe

**Studies in Education No.9, Institute of Economic Affairs, London, 2000, 114pp, £10 (pbk)
(ISBN 0 255 36478 4)**

In this book, Denis O’Keeffe explores the connection between public finance and totalitarian ideology, and how the resulting “political correctness” presents a threat to our civilisation as great as - though more subtle than - either national or Marxian socialism.

For many, political correctness is a bit of a joke - a matter of renaming firemen as firefighters, or trying to decide whether a black man or a white woman deserves higher status as a victim. For Dr O’Keeffe, this is to take a dangerously superficial view of what political correctness represents. It is not a joke. It is, much rather, a set of linked propositions about race, sex, culture and sexual preference that may not be challenged without danger to livelihood or sometimes even personal safety. These propositions have established themselves in education, in public administration, and increasingly in the media and in every area of private life. They have been accompanied by an abandonment of all those disciplines that strengthen the critical faculties - literacy, numeracy, and a regard for the intellectual traditions of the West. These have been undermined by what may be called asymmetric relativism. We are told that nothing can be proved beyond reasonable doubt, even in the sciences, that the boundaries between right and wrong cannot be sharply defined, that to denounce welfare dependency and self-destructive indulgence is to be “judgmental”. There is no corresponding diffidence about the rightness of any politically correct proposition or the actions suggested by it.

Of course, some people who hold these propositions have no very malignant agenda. They believe - and rightly - that black people, women and homosexuals have had a bad time in the past, and that a certain bias in their favour now, and an avoidance of offensive language, is wholly right and proper. But in its essentials, political correctness is an excuse for persecution of dissent, and is as much a betrayal of the vaguely liberal values from which it feeds as the Inquisition was of the Christian faith. It is not about freedom and equality within any existing society, but is about the separatism and supremacy of certain groups. Dr O’Keeffe explains:

The claims it makes about race, sex and culture imply an utterly bleak and non-negotiable reality. In each case a hated enemy is identified - men, white people, Western culture - and identified as irredeemable. Men are seen as intellectually and affectively quite

remote from women, as are white people from blacks. Non-European cultures are viewed as having nothing in common with mainstream European culture. It is alleged that humans vary cognitively in terms of race, sex and culture, to such degree that we should think of white consciousness, science and art as utterly different from black mentality and thought, of the male mind as making no contact with the female mind and so on. [pp.45-46]

Anyone who accepts this has abandoned belief in one human race and in the likelihood that people of different origins can live together in peace and mutual tolerance. Though political correctness is most often pushed by those who used to be Communists, it is not in its nature Marxist. That always at least was claimed as a universalist creed that could resolve all differences between person and person. What we have here is much closer to national socialism.

The claim that men cannot coexist with women, or whites with blacks, is very like the claim that Germans cannot live with the *untermenschen*.... PC is an... ideology... [that] asserts congenital differences.... Like Nazism and Fascism before it, PC has inherited from European romanticism a mania for separation. Like these movements PC retains the equality principle in a restricted form. Just as the Nazis wanted equality among Germans and for them alone, so the various currents of PC remain egalitarian for their chosen groups. [p.46]

Though there have been thousands of victims of political correctness over the past few decades, few of these have suffered more than loss of income or status. There has been yet no politically correct Auschwitz. But this is to take a static view of the ideology. It is in its essence totalitarian and murderous in its desired consequences. To deny its danger on the grounds that it has so few victims is much the same as saying that Marxism in 1916 or national socialism in 1932 was not really dangerous.

His definitions stated and explained, Dr O’Keeffe now goes on to show how political correctness is almost entirely a product of government finance in education. He grants that government has been paying for education in Britain and America for a very long time, and the worst effect of this has been inefficiency and the discouragement of better alternatives. It is only in the past generation that political correctness has taken over education. But again, he says that dwelling on this truth shows a misunderstanding of social dynamics. Public finance enables education to be colonised by totalitarian ideology just as not wearing an overcoat in winter exposes you to higher risk of catching a cold - that you do not catch one for several years does not invalidate the claim that getting cold lowers resistance to infection.

The problem with public finance in education is that it makes government and not parents the customer. Governments do not have the same direct interest in ensuring that the curriculum is acceptable in the moral and financial sense; and though parents can organise to pressure governments into demanding changes, this requires commitment and political skills that few can be bothered to acquire. Dr O’Keeffe gives one example of resistance:

A plan by the Local Education Authority in one of the big London boroughs a few years ago to have the schools teach that homosexuality is as normal as heterosexual love was thwarted by massive opposition from Catholics, Moslems, Sikhs etc. [pp.81-82]

But as the public choice economists have shown, a majority will defeat a small but passionate minority only in those few cases where the majority is equally passionate in the other direction. In all else, the minority will get its way. Unpopular notions can be imposed in the public sector in ways that they cannot in the private.

It is Dr O’Keeffe’s opinion that

in the absence of public funds the growth of destructive ideologies would have been far less likely. [p.72, italics in original]

He continues:

Could the dangerous initiatives of sex education and other forms of 'values clarification',... have been mounted without public funds? Would many parents, before the long years of supply-led propaganda, have paid straight cash for children to be taught to call husbands and wives 'partners' and see sexual activity only in terms of self-gratification and prudence? Would people have directly surrendered scarce income to have children urged to 'negotiate' the moral order? [pp.72-73]

One of the problems with political correctness is, as said, that it feeds off liberal values that to some extent most people accept. Therefore, criticising political correctness can sound like a critique of liberalism. Dr O'Keeffe does not approve of homosexuality, and has a generally conservative view of sex. I think most libertarians would be happier with a concentration on how political correctness is an attack on freedom of speech and association. However, Dr O'Keeffe's solution to the problem is one on which we can all agree. Cutting off all public finance to education and ending compulsion in education will not end the problem, but will confine it to a few exotic outposts where it will no longer be able to do the harm that it has done and threatens yet to do. In short, he wants to reprivatise education - to make it once again a matter for parents to decide. In addition, he wants an attack on the rest of the public sector. For Dr O'Keeffe, big government is not bad only or even mainly because it is economically wasteful, but because it enables an erosion of the moral order.

This review is inevitably short and cannot do full justice to Dr O'Keeffe's book. I will therefore conclude by saying that it is easily one of the most original and interesting things published by the Institute of Economic Affairs in recent years. It provides a unified view of political correctness and an analysis of the public sector that combines elements of conservatism and libertarianism into a potentially devastating attack.

Marian Halcombe

Dawn of the Dead

Directed by George A. Romero,
USA, 1979, 140 minutes

This film was recently shown on BBC2 in its "Forbidden Season". Though described in *The Radio Times* as "the *Citizen Kane* of horror" and promised in its entirety, several minutes from it appear to have been forbidden by the controllers. The cinema version, which I saw in June 1980, I remember as much nastier - more blood, more cannibal scenes, and even some zombie children at the airstrip. Never mind this, however. The film has been trimmed of a few superficial horrors. But the effect has only been to bring its political message into sharper focus.

And its message is one that might have been written by Jared Taylor, the Editor of *American Renaissance*, and have inspired the murder of Stephen Lawrence. For *Dawn of the Dead* is best seen as a white separatist parable, in which the zombies represent the blacks and hispanics and the heroes represent the white race.

Of course, there are objections to this exegesis. In the first place, the critics all agree that the film is a satire on American capitalism. Indeed, Mr Romero himself says so. In his ten minute introduction to the BBC2 showing, he mumbled very earnestly about "materialism" and Ronald Reagan. In the second place, the zombies are played indiscriminately by black and white actors, and the leading character is black. But there is no need to spend much time on either of these points. It stands to reason that Mr Romero should try to conceal his film's true meaning from the PC dictatorship that rules America. He covered his true meaning back in 1979 by using a black actor for the

lead; and he keeps it covered today by echoing the critics - people, in any case, who can be relied on to miss the point of everything they watch. For myself, I cannot conceive how any reasonable person could sit through *Dawn of the Dead* and not come away struck by its advocacy of racial segregation where not supremacy.

It opens in the middle of a huge crisis. America is being overrun by zombies. It seems that a plague has killed about half the population, and these have risen from the dead to prey on the living - sometimes to eat them, sometimes just to infect them with plague so that they in turn die and become zombies. Since these zombies have no intellectual capacity, but are driven by a few basic instincts, it should have been possible to destroy them at the beginning, or at least to contain them. It is plain, however, that the authorities have taken no firm action until it is too late. The opening scenes are shot in a television studio, where a chaotic debate is in progress. This is intercut with news bulletins about how the President has just sent another package of tough measures to Congress, and how communications with Detroit have just been lost. Armed police are roaming the streets, shooting at zombies - who need head shots, by the way, before they lie down. But even now, when the danger has become obvious, the fight for survival is being sabotaged. Too many people believe that the zombies are human beings, and refuse to kill them or give them up to be killed in the common interest. In one scene, a woman embraces a zombie, insisting that it is her husband: it bites a lump out of her neck. Even worse, there are people so twisted in their outlook that they side with the zombies against humanity. About a minute after the biting scene, a priest exults over the growing numbers and strength of the zombies and laughs at the armed policemen who are risking their lives to save his.

Though the authorities keep insisting that people should remain in the cities while taking precautions, it is obvious that no built-up area is safe: the zombies are everywhere. No doors can keep them out. They are dragging people from their cars. The heroes - two television people, male and female, and two policemen - realise that the cities are no longer the havens of civility that they were built to be, but have become more dangerous than any wilderness. They take a traffic helicopter from the studio roof and fly out into the country. They have limited fuel and no idea where they are going. They just fly in hope of finding a place where they can again live in safety among their own kind. Looking down, they see the roads choked with military and other official vehicles streaming out of the city. As ever, the rulers of America are happy to recommend one course of action while doing something quite different for themselves.

Further into the country, we find the rednecks at work. They have no delusions about the humanity of the zombies, and are slaughtering them without mercy - but, sadly, without much efficiency. They have the right instincts, but lack the sort of leadership that would ultimately save them. We see the rednecks drinking beer and playing rock music as they load and reload. But the zombies are stumbling towards them in an unending stream. Sooner or later, the bullets will run out, or the night sentries be overpowered, and another outpost of humanity will have fallen to the outsiders.

Moving on, our heroes come to vast shopping mall powered by a nuclear generator. After looking without success for helicopter fuel, they realise that they have found their promised land. It is a place filled with every good and desirable thing. There is food and clothing and shelter and electricity, and weapons and ammunition, all in endless abundance. Like most other promised lands, however, it is already occupied. Unable to appreciate or enjoy what they have taken, zombies wander round in a parody of human activity. But despite their superior numbers, they are no match for human ingenuity. The zombies have a limited capacity to use tools: the humans have the entire contents of a gun shop. Those zombies still in the car park outside are excluded. The reinforced glass doors are locked, and

lorries are parked just in front of them to prevent any build up of brute pressure against the glass that might force an opening. Those inside the mall are exterminated in a carefully planned offensive. Their bodies are neatly stacked in some of the cavernous freezer rooms. The bloodstains are washed away. By the time the humans have done their work, the mall has become once more a safe and pleasant resort.

The middle scenes of the film are taken up with the idyll in the mall. The television woman grows big with child. The men make full use of the resources available. They mark out as their living quarters a suite of upper offices that have access to the helicopter parked on the roof, and furnish them with commendable taste from the shops below. They then build a false wall between the corridor that leads up to their living quarters from the mall. As in the great extermination just passed, we see them using the minds that are their real weapon against the numerous but lower beings who would otherwise destroy them. Indeed, we see their humanity displayed even more prominently than in the extermination. That was an act of immediate need. This is a preparation made wisely but without any immediate danger. They are settlers who have cleared their land and secured it against aggression, and who by virtue of their work have earned a fully moral right to the enjoyment of its fruits.

The zombies have not gone away. The world outside the mall is teeming with them. They have overrun one less secure human settlement after another. The television broadcasts become yet more chaotic, more filled with pointless argument - and less technically accomplished. The manned studio of the opening scenes has dwindled to a hand-held camera in a bunker. The broadcasts become increasingly infrequent, and then stop. The airwaves fall silent. Though they have not the means of breaking into the mall, the zombies remain outside, squeezing themselves past the lorries, pressing their faces against the glass doors, howling with brute lust for the warm human flesh they see inside but cannot reach.

I was not at first sure about the Hell's Angels who eventually break into the mall. They do not represent the lefties - they are too well-organised. They do not represent the Jews - they are not bright enough, and they affect no compassion for the excluded zombies. But then I realised: they are the Soviets. They lack the comforts of civilisation, but they have the sort of command structure that is very effective for surviving without natural defences, surrounded by zombies - those numerous but lower beings. They smash their way into that mall simply to plunder it. They make no effort to keep the zombies out who follow them in, nor to use their presence for any constructive purpose. Of course, the Hell's Angels are driven out: they lack the organisation and firepower for victory. In the retreat from the mall - and Mr Romero here may be predicting events that have yet fully to happen - many of them fall victim to the zombies, and we see their bodies devoured.

But despite their victory, our heroes have not won. The battle has allowed the zombies to retake possession of the mall. Still worse, one of them has been so badly wounded that he dies alone in a liftshaft and emerges himself a zombie. I am still not sure what this represents. Perhaps it means that we must be continually on guard against our own relapsing into lower ways. It might be so, considering that another of the heroes has already died and then been destroyed to prevent his becoming a danger to humanity. Then again, it might represent an intellectual conversion to the ways of the enemy. Jared Taylor *et al.* are continually lamenting the inability of white people to remain racially aware, and their tendency to protect and advance outsiders. Whatever the case, the new zombie smashes down the partition wall, and leads the others up into the human quarters.

In the penultimate sequences, the two survivors - the black policemen and the pregnant woman - get into their helicopter and escape just as the zombies have completed their retaking of the mall and are coming

onto the roof. They have little fuel and still no idea of where to go. But as they fly off into the dawn, we know that somehow they will survive. They represent a new dawn for humanity - a dawn that will put an end to the reign of brute savagery and reclaim the world for civilisation.

But the mall is lost. In the final scene, the zombies are as close to celebrating as such mindless creatures can be - staggering up and down the escalators, and falling into the ornamental fountain. Very briefly, but significantly, we see cobwebs forming on the central display. The zombies can take, but they cannot maintain. They have the numbers to deny a future to others, but they have no future themselves.

There - does this or does this not make sense of the film? Is it not this subtext that gives the film its power over audiences that dare not openly express their fears in public? Will Mr Romero send me \$100 for having rumbled him? Or will he sue me for libel? We shall see.

Howard Perkins

Editor's Note: For those who have no sense of humour, I must add that the above article is intended as satire. Mr Perkins is not, to my reasonable knowledge, a white separatist; nor, most certainly, is *Free Life* anything but a libertarian journal. It would be most unfortunate if we were to find ourselves dragged before the tribunals of the new politically incorrect Inquisition - still worse, perhaps, to be sued by Mr Romero.

Personally, I doubt the truth or Mr Perkins' exegesis. Great works of art - and such *Dawn of the Dead* undeniably is - allow a multitude of different and often mutually hostile interpretations. My English teacher at school made what seemed at the time a good case for claiming *King Lear* as a Marxist classic. I once heard somebody else explain at length that *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is a castration fantasy. I am sure the lefty critics can put their case better than Mr Perkins is willing to allow; and I am sure that Mr Romero does believe that he has made a film that satirises the American way of life. I also saw the interview, and he did have just the right degree of earnestness that one expects of American film people when they try to sound intellectual.

For me, *Dawn of the Dead* represents the folly of gun control. Though the humans appear to be losing throughout the film, they are able to hold on for a while because they have unrestricted access to the firepower they need. I do not suppose that England is about to be invaded by millions of zombies. Even so, there are natural disasters - plagues, floods, famines, the occasional meteorite impact, and so forth - are surprisingly common; and there is no certainty that our authorities will be always as able to keep order as they presently do. We have just lived through what many predicted would be a great "Millennium Bug" crisis. That this one came to nothing does not mean we shall be so lucky in future.

Now, imagine a world in which order has collapsed, and the cities have been taken over by bandits and maniacs - and in which there are no guns to pull out of bedside drawers, and no gun shops to break into. That will be a world without hope of restoration, or even individual courage in any meaningful sense. If I had to die in such a world, far better to go with a heap of the enemy dead outside my fastness and a bullet each left over for me and Mrs Gabb. Far better than that trying fighting back with a breadknife tied to a broom handle.

I do not suppose this argument will appeal much to Tony Blair - not, I ought to mention, that he would need to worry, as he lives surrounded by twenty armed guards. I doubt also if any of the other usual suspects in the victim disarmament fraud will be convinced. But I find it conclusive, and I imagine most of my readers do.

Final Jottings

Brian Micklethwait

One

Our Editor, using the magic that is Adobe Acrobat, has sent me a rough electronic draft of *Free Life* 36 - that is to say a rough draft of everything else in this issue but this - to prod me into jotting my jottings, and to supply me with stuff to jot about. So I've already read the rest of this issue, approximately speaking, and I'm flattered and delighted that so many nice-sounding strangers have seen fit to comment on my opinions in the correspondence page. Unlike those early *Free Life* correspondents of the mid-nineties with funny American-German names, these ones seem to be real.

My main reaction to the Great Gabb/Micklethwait Debate so far is: that I have no illusions about my abilities to persuade people in power of the truth and wisdom of my libertarian opinions, or even to bother with them that much. I don't recall ever claiming that I had "Socratic dialogues" with politicians, of the sort that have any effect on the politicians themselves or their various doings. What I do claim, as Mr Sorens especially gets, is that third parties (and fourth parties and ten thousandth parties) listening in on my Socratic Dialogues are susceptible to persuasion.

Free Life readers outside the range of the Non-World Service of the BBC should not get any exaggerated ideas about how often or for how long I am as yet permitted to engage in such debates. At present it seems to happen about once every week or two, and mostly only for a few minutes. But when I do broadcast I generally manage to emit a few worthwhile sound bites. My latest little effort, last Sunday morning on BBC Radio 5 (which lasted for about ten minutes) included a reference to the badness of criminalising the conversations of "consenting racists in private", a sound bite which makes several big points in no time at all. I managed to criticise the newly created legal category of a racially motivated crime with exactly the right degree of unease that I do truly feel, without myself coming across as any sort of racist. The talk then turned to the varieties of public style and atmosphere made possible by the private ownership of public space.

By constantly placing such sound bites into the public ear, and by making available pamphletised reinforcement of them to all who want to explore further, I and my Libertarian Alliance comrades can reasonably hope to have some effect, on this generation of decision-makers by slightly changing the environment in which they operate, and on later generations of decision-makers by changing the way that they think.

Two

That such longer term thought alteration is possible was illustrated by my last-but-one Socratic Dialogue (or rather Multilogue - pardon my Latin/Greek), on BBC Radio Scotland earlier last week in connection with BMW's decision to sell Rover Cars, in which the assembled throng discussed the rights and wrongs of government subsidies to industry. It was truly amazing and most refreshing how confidently we who opposed such subsidies (for I was joined in my condemnations of them by several Scottish callers-in with a lifetime of practical experience of their extreme harmfulness) did so with such moral and intellectual confidence, and how feebly those who still clung to their contrary axioms spoke of nothing except how sad it was and how angry and betrayed they felt. The sound bite count was about nine-one to us: "it's our money" - "what about the unfairness to other workers who aren't rescued?" - "culture of subsidy" (I said that first and others

repeated it) - "crowding out" - "subsidies are the problem, not the solution", and so on. The only response was that the "strong pound" was the real problem, although actually the pound isn't that strong; it's the Euro that's weak. I also got to trash (someone had mentioned how he wanted a "level playing field") the notion that free trade can only be practised safely if everyone else is doing it too. A Conservative Party woman, who popped up on *Question Time* the next evening, confined herself to criticising the government for not having cleared the subsidy they were trying to give to Rover with the EU, who now apparently have the power to suppress such things. But as was well explained, the scale of the further subsidy now being argued about would be enough to keep Rover going, at its current loss rate, for about another two months, such is the scale of the Rover disaster.

So, two decent little performances then. Most listeners ignore it all. But a few don't. And then the true Socratic Dialogues get underway, inside the heads of people who, for example, sort of assume that you have to have subsidies to industry, but now realise that some very bright and eloquent and experienced people think that you shouldn't. A convinced socialist, who genuinely believes that without subsidies the British Motor Industry would have collapsed years ago, hears, for the first time in his life, that not everybody shares this assumption, for here are these old Scottish geezers opposing subsidies not because they don't care a fig about British car making, but because they care about it very much. Others have assumed that racism, being extremely nasty, should obviously therefore be as illegal as it is possible to make it. Yet here's this bloke, who isn't a racist himself, making a distinction between this kind of racism and that kind. Hmm. What about that then? Interesting.

Others already agree with me, but didn't realise that anyone in the entire world thought like that with sufficient self-confidence to say such things in a radio studio, or was clever enough to get into a radio studio to say them. They are greatly cheered up, and are stirred into speaking out more themselves. They may even ring up the Libertarian Alliance and get sent some pamphlets. And so it goes. Socratic Dialogue doesn't change the world completely, straight away. What does? But it still works.

Three

I don't get asked onto the Radio in spite of my libertarian extremism, but because of it. This is something I learned from watching the socialist extremists of my youth in action. Official, front-bench-controlled political multilogue is as dull and stale and consensual and pessimistic as it's ever been in living memory. "There's only one way to do politics. It doesn't achieve anything much these days, but what else is there?" That's the dominant mood. The currently dominant view of Britain's National Health Service, for example, can be summarised thus: "It should be given zillions more money, but it won't do any good." I join in by saying: "You're right, what you people are doing is indeed useless. You should stop doing it and stop taxing us all for it. Here's how great it would be if you did that." Libertarianism the way I try to do it is both provocative and positive, the way socialism used to be. (This is why I keep jotting on in these jottings about how great the great stuff is that capitalism is allowed to do, like, in this jotting, Adobe Acrobat. What a programme! Libertarian Alliance artwork bouncing around the entire globe! Wow wee! That's going to happen Real Soon Now.) When on the radio, as I do from time to time, I chicken out of being Mr Libertarian, I always regret it, not just because I missed the chance to be Mr Libertarian, but because I'm less likely to get asked back.