



Item: My friend, the LA Secretary Chris Tame wrote an article about Privatising the Police. This appeared in the *Free Nation* of June 1982, the newspaper of the “right wing” Freedom association, and Chris was hoping for a deluge of “yours disgusted Cheltenham” letters, to enable him to keep the argument going. Nothing. Not one.

Item: The “Tory Conference Report” (*Free Nation*, November 1983) notes that a Freedom Association meeting on “the need for constitutional reform” was, although apparently not in a very big room, “packed”. “We were surprised by the level of informed interest in this last subject which we thought peculiar to the Association. Conservative conferences now seem to be drawing a pretty philosophical crowd.”

Item: The Freedom Association published a pamphlet of racist quotations culled from the writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (£1.20 from the Alternative Bookshop — introduction by Professor Antony Flew). The FA advertised it in *Contact*, the journal of that left-wing citadel the Inner London Educational Authority.

Outrage! Letters poured in. How dare you advertise this muck! The Freedom Association are monsters! Horror! Disgust! No concern was expressed about whether Marx and Engels were racists. It just isn't the thing to say this. Not done. Principle of the thing. Long letter from Professor Flew (which *Contact*, to their great credit, did print) rebutting the various insults hurled at the leaflet, and contesting the assumption (for that was all it was) that Marx and Engels were sound chaps despite everything.

Item: I work in the Alternative Bookshop, which sells the literature of the free market and of the open society. We don't like being called “right wing”, but we inevitably are. Despite that I have *never*, in all my time at the shop, been set upon by any yours disgusted Cheltenham, even though there's plenty to annoy them (“Youth Liberation” leaflets, LEGALISE HEROIN badges, a prominently displayed leaflet on lowering the age of sexual consent.) Could it be that yours disgusted Cheltenham no longer exist? On the other hand, I occasionally do talks on

libertarianism to Conservative gatherings, and can confirm that this party is now rife with philosophical thoughtfulness.

Item: Two youths enter the Alternative Bookshop. They look about them. One youth is silent, but the other emits loud barking noises, discernable as the two words: “Hayek!” and “Fascist!” Exit both youths.

It would take a whole book to communicate the stupendous depths of wilful ignorance plumbed by these two animal cries. If the youth making the noises had never heard of Hayek, then his ignorance of Hayek's theories would be excusable, yet he clearly had heard of Hayek, and held strong views about him.

One of Hayek's best known books, *The Road To Serfdom*, is an attack on socialism. And what, according to Hayek, is socialism's crime? *It leads to fascism*. Never mind whether Hayek's analysis is correct. The point is that were he really a fascist the fact that socialism leads to fascism would not count in his eyes as a crime. Good for socialism, he would have said, as many real fascists did say.

In general, the use by leftists of the word “fascist” to describe absolutely anyone who disagrees with them, including believers in the ideas of individualism and individual liberty (which were and are constantly and explicitly denounced by real fascists with extreme clarity and ferocity) reveals an amazing contempt for the English language, and for coherent thought generally.

### WHO WAS COLONEL BLIMP?

Many years ago, according to legend, there lived a beast called “Colonel Blimp”.

Before he died, what sort of person was Colonel Blimp? What distinguished him from a mere Conservative? Not having met any living examples of the species I can only describe the memory of the him that has been handed down to me.

Colonel Blimp possessed the following qualities:

— Tremendous confidence in the correctness of his opinions.

### Cultural Notes No. 7

ISSN 0267-677X ISBN 1 85637 209 X

An occasional publication of the Libertarian Alliance, 25 Chapter Chambers, Esterbrooke Street, London SW1P 4NN  
www.libertarian.co.uk email: admin@libertarian.co.uk

© 1984: Libertarian Alliance; Brian Micklethwait.

The views expressed in this publication are those of its author, and not necessarily those of the Libertarian Alliance, its Committee, Advisory Council or subscribers.

Director: Dr Chris R. Tame Editorial Director: Brian Micklethwait Webmaster: Dr Sean Gabb



FOR LIFE, LIBERTY AND PROPERTY

— Tremendous hostility to intellectuals, and to thought in general, that is, to explaining why his own opinions were correct and all others hopelessly wrong. You either understood, or you didn't.

— Species solidarity. Colonel Blimp knew a fellow member of his species at once.

— The observation of consumer habits as a substitute for political thought. Although bursting with political opinions, about bolshies, dagos, wogs and so forth, Colonel Blimp made no sharp distinction between a person being a bolshy and a person drinking the wrong sort of drink, wearing the wrong sort of clothes, or travelling by an unsuitable form of transport.

If he met someone dressed like a bolshy, drinking a bolshy drink, but *who opposed bolshevism*, Colonel Blimp would still denounce the anti-bolshy in question as a bolshy, in a loud voice.

On the other hand, someone driving an MG and wearing Colonel Blimp costume, but expressing *anti Colonel Blimp political views*, is the worst sort of bolshy. "The fellow dresses like one of us!" Colonel Blimp would shout.

The shouting is important. A Colonel Blimp who no longer addresses bolshies with loudmouthed offensiveness, but instead mutters something into his gin and tonic about how he doesn't "understand anything anymore" is no longer Colonel Blimp. He is Colonel Blimp retired.

Now, run your eye down this list of Blimp qualities and note that leftists more and more conform to the same kind of stereotype. Colonel Blimp is dead. Long live Comrade Blimp.

I'm not trying to be offensive just for the sake of it. Unlike Colonel Blimp I am offering what I intend as a coherent observation. I'm trying to understand how things are. I have included evidence, and there is plenty of other evidence I can imagine that might prove me wrong.

## WHAT FOLLOWS?

But suppose I'm right. Suppose that Colonel Blimp is alive and well, but with a different title and in a different ecological niche. If so, the phenomenon of Colonel Blimp offers a powerful insight into the future development and impact of his lefty (bolshy!) successor.

Frankly, the Colonel Blimp story is cause for *extreme optimism* to all who oppose him. Colonel Blimp became politically impotent, and then extinct, in an incredibly short space of time. So too, I think, will Comrade Blimp. At the very least Comrade Blimp may soon be muttering about how socialism "seemed like a good idea at the time" and whining apologetically that "we really did see some people as fascists".

Why the suddenness of Blimp's eclipse? It comes down to his contempt for rational argument. If you say to someone that he's a sound chap, because of the school tie he's wearing, or because of his CND badge, you'll encounter no disagreement. Me, a fine fellow. But of course. Never mind the feebleness of the argument. When did you last hear of an author complaining about a rave review, on the grounds that the reviewer didn't explain properly why he thought the book was stupendous?

If someone says you're wrong about Chile because your figures for the number of people killed by Pinochet are out, or because Allende wasn't so bad as you're claiming, in short if someone argues with you rationally, you are liable to be convinced. But if he tells you you're wrong about Chile *because you are wearing the wrong kind of tie*, you will absolutely not be convinced. Quite the reverse. The argument that a "sound dresser is a sound thinker" only convinces the sound dressers. Unsound dressers are more than ever convinced that the sound dressers are idiotic.

An extraordinary proportion of leftist rhetoric is now of this peculiar stylistic kind. Reagan is wrong, because he was once a cowboy film actor. Thatcher is wrong, because she wears her hair blue. Young Conservatives are wrong because they wear suits, talk in funny voices and play tennis. American soldiers are wrong because they wear sun glasses. British soldiers are wrong because they always comb their hair. NATO officials are wrong because they travel in shiny black cars. This is fine for convincing fellow readers of the *New Statesman*, and keeps dozens of talented leftist graphic artists happily employed, but it is quite hopeless for converting NATO officials or Young Conservatives. In their heyday this is exactly what socialists were able to do.

Just like Colonel Blimp, Comrade Blimp especially loathes people who adopt some of his plumage without sharing his political prejudices, as we in the Alternative Bookshop have particular cause to know. A recent article in the *New Statesman* by Duncan Campbell included an entire paragraph about how a certain government phone-tapper had the dashed sauce to ride about on a bicycle! This is not the way for Comrade Blimp to recruit government phone-tappers to his cause.

Blimps make a tremendous amount of noise. That's their nature. But when the Blimps have become too old to raise hell, or have simply died off, what then? The truth stands starkly revealed. For all their caterwauling, they were convincing only each other, and merely antagonising everyone else. (The reputed Colonel Blimp sport of ducking homosexuals in fountains probably did more for the cause of bolshevism than the entire Left Book Club's output combined.). When Blimp dies everyone heaves a sigh of relief.

## PROLETARIAN COMRADES

There's a minor exception to this rule. Comrade Blimp, now thirty five and rising, is convincing some proletarian thugs of the truth of his opinions. This was Colonel Blimp's one big success as well. Remember those sturdy proletarian collaborators Bulldog Drummond always took with him on his adventures. It takes a proletarian thug to be impressed by Blimp's only slightly more educated thuggery, bombast and comic book graphics. So we can expect noisy marches by East End leftist dockers, by middle aged ex football hooligans and the like, for a good many years yet, and the leftist equivalent of the National Front. Tiresome. But by about 2020 the Comrade Blimp syndrome itself will be a thing of the past.

As the years go by and all Comrade Blimp's caterwauling is seen by him to achieve nothing, he begins to read the writing on the wall. Comrade Blimp's publications become ever more doom laden, as the future slips from his grasp. Nuclear catastrophe and ecological disaster are brooded upon with pathological intensity. Is it fanciful to suggest that some of them actually want the end of the world to be nigh, so that nobody else can have any future either?

Insofar as there is now, still, any intellectual substance to socialism (and do not confuse being a professor at a university with having intellectual substance) then socialism will continue to be a problem. There is some, so it will. But there isn't much.

The other lesson to be learned is that although proving Comrade Blimp's opinions wrong in interesting and unfamiliar ways is well worth doing, as the Marx/Engels Race pamphlet does for example, constantly repeating familiar anti Comrade Blimp arguments is rather a waste of effort.

Any fool can list the people and institutions he is against, as Comrade Blimp himself proves every day. But what of the alternative institutions Comrade Blimp's opponents then create? How will things be when these persons are quarrelling not with Comrade Blimp, but with each other? That is the important and interesting question.