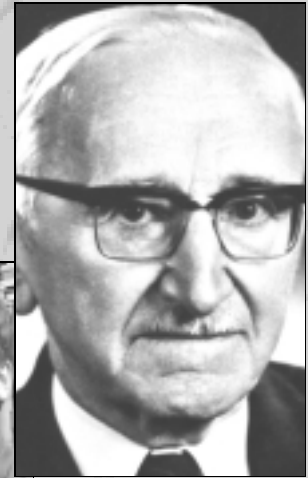




# LIBERTY IN FRANCE:

A PERSONAL ACCOUNT OF  
THE "XXIIÈME UNIVERSITÉ D'ÉTÉ  
DE LA NOUVELLE ÉCONOMIE,  
AIX-EN-PROVENCE,  
SEPTEMBER 6TH-11TH 1999: HAYEK  
AND THE ROAD TO FREEDOM"

ANTOINE CLARKE



*"They may have had the soldiers and the warheads and the fine-sounding ideology that suckered the college students and nitwit Third Worlders, but we had all the fun." — P. J. O'Rourke*

*"Get a life!" — Sharon Stone in Sliver*

What a brilliant subject! F. A. Hayek was born a century ago. There have been a number of celebrations of his work this year by the Institute of Economic Affairs. I had some misgivings however about the wisdom of selecting a somewhat long-winded economist for a week-long series of conferences. I thought it would be dry, never having had the patience to read through any of Friedrich Hayek's longer pieces. Perhaps it was the threat of a having to digest another 100 years of Hayekian analysis that persuaded the Foreign Department of the KGB to call it a day. Instead of empty threats to prosecute former Soviet spies, they should have been pardoned on condition that they read out all three volumes of *Law, Legislation and Liberty* without a break, or *The Fatal Conceit* holding the book upside down. I expected to sit through a few sessions of watching paint melt (it's hot in Aix en Provence in early September), and hoped to catch up during the breaks and evenings with some interesting Euro-Libbos and assorted British dissident academics such as David Marsland, Dennis O'Keefe, Steve Davies and Antony Flew. As it turned out Marsland wasn't there, neither was Flew, and both Steve Davies and Christie Davies appeared to leave early, the former pleading a vital Manchester City engagement in the Worthington Cup.

## HAYEK AS ANTI-MARX

It turns out that the decision to anchor the week around Hayek's work was an inspired decision. Dry Hayek may have occasionally been. But his work was multi-disciplinary and covered law, economics, political philosophy, epistemology, and organising intellectual battles. The themes for the six days were: "Hayek's Legacy", "Restoring the Rule of Law", "Enforcing Market Disciplines", "Associating Personal Responsibility and Social Progress", "Giving its Real Meaning to Democracy", and "Uniting Freedom of Action and the Dignity of the Individual". Hayek was also the recognised intellectual basis of Thatcherism. His influence on the relatively happy ending to the twentieth century is easily overlooked, especially by the Leftist academic establishment which tried so hard to destroy Western civilisation. No other intellectual figure this century did more to repair the harm caused by Socialism and its evil advocates, many of them currently being exposed as the agents of the Soviet cause. If anyone deserves the accolade (which Hayek himself would doubtless have tried to refuse) of "Anti-Marx" it is Hayek. He lived to see both the rise and fall of Soviet Communism.

## THE EFFECTIVENESS OF RALPH HARRIS

Now consider the audience: French liberals and libertarians gloomy about the future of their country after 18 years of domination by Socialists and Jacques "Couillon" Chirac, Eastern Europeans bewildered at the lack of progress towards a free society after 1989. There were Americans who can scarcely believe the triumph of the muddle way of Clinton, Swedes who gloomily realised that compared with home, they were in a free country.

Hayek's work was perfect at explaining why their countries were in the mess that they are, why Communism failed, and offered some pointers as to how to escape from the Road to Serfdom (or in some cases from having arrived at quasi-serfdom). I would never have predicted it when I first saw the agenda for the week but Lord Harris was probably the most effective performer: his interventions were awesome in that he picked a fight with a top-ranking politician in an almost offensive way. The result was that the young people present realised that they didn't have to take orders from the failing politicians: it's the libertarian activists who will push the agenda not the pompous fat cats. Lord Harris also realised exactly what the Eastern Europeans needed to hear: that Britain was in just the same mess in the 1970s as they are today and it can get better (whatever Dr Gabb says). He didn't over-praise Thatcherism either, he pointed out for in-



## Personal Perspectives No. 11



ISSN 0267-7156 ISBN 1 85637 473 4

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

© 1999: Libertarian Alliance; Antoine Clarke.

Antoine Clarke is a Freelance writer and Press Officer. He is a graduate in philosophy from Birkbeck College, London. His previous occupations include Economic and Political Adviser to the Finance Minister of the Slovak Republic, Deputy Editor of Conflict International. He is the Editor and Proprietor of *TANSTAAFL Times*, in issue 23 of which this article also appears, under the title "Far From The Madding Crowd".

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**

stance that the Tories had failed miserably to cut taxation. However Harris's acknowledgement of the limits of Mrs Thatcher's revolution made his presentation all the more inspiring: he was spelling out what was possible, without glossing over the problems.

The venue was Aix-Marseille's Law, Economics and Sciences University at Aix-en-Provence. The organisers were the European branch of the Institute of Humane Studies which goes under the monicker IES-Europe (Institute of Economic Studies). This organisation is based in Paris. Although it is by no means the only organisation dedicated to generating links between the free world on both sides of the Atlantic (the Leadership Institute and the Heritage Foundation spring to mind), it perhaps going to be the most effective, because although there is massive US involvement in IES-Europe (I would guess most of the cash was American), the format is clearly designed to generate a self-sustaining Libertarian movement throughout Europe. If I were a depressive Tory who sees doom everywhere, I would nit-pick and try to persuade myself that IHS is evil because it didn't back "the right people" on some obscure and distant occasion. I could pick out two of the Italians who were jerks into "pluralism", meaning that there is no such thing as a bad idea. A silly notion if there ever was one. There were also two very bright Radical Party members who spent the whole week mingling with the libertarians, interrogating them. I could also moan about the occasional loss of cool by some of the half dozen conference helpers and the frequent break-down in the simultaneous translation service. Since I'm bilingual and the sessions were in French and English, I say "tant pis"! I could also pick out the weakest French professors and the two politicians who were nearly as bad as Tory politicians from the mid-1980s (except that they've matched none of the positive Thatcherite achievements. They've managed to do the bit about copying all the mistakes).

However, according to the LA's pessimist fringe I'm supposed to be the "Panglossian optimist". Pangloss was the philosopher in *Candide* who kept repeating that this was the best of all possible worlds, despite the most horrific evidence to the contrary, the pessimists of course, fear that he was right.

### THE AMERICANS

Nobel prize winner Gary Becker gave a very good talk on the problem of knowledge in planning and markets, mentioning his encounters with Hayek in seminars at the University of Chicago. That evening he was presented with an honorary doctorate from the university of Aix-Marseille. It is his first honorary degree in Western Europe ...

Randy Barnett gave an excellent overview of the history of US federalism and the various tensions between federalist and anti-federalist. I'd heard rave reviews of his work and had feared that he was over-hyped. Not so.

Karen Vaughn was very popular because she started by announcing where her limits of expertise were and then proceeded to give as good a libertarian an analysis I have heard of American politics without foaming at the mouth or referring to the "C" word or his wife. She also made herself available for interviews. Dennis O'Keefe went down very well with his paper on political correctness.

Professor Daniel Klein of the University of Santa Clara contrasted Hayek with Rothbard and suggested that Rothbard's definition of liberty was better than Hayek's. However, when it came to defining limitations, ambiguity and generally the problems of selecting choices on the basis of degree of liberty, Rothbard offers unsatisfactory definitions. Professor Klein's recent book *Reputation* from the University of Michigan Press deals with the private provision of regulation. Dr Todd Flanders was especially popular with the many young women present. He works for the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Lib-

erty. His presentation was interesting, in that he started by outlining an objection made by some Catholics to Liberalism, which is that it is too "scientific". This particular attack on Liberalism is completely unexpected, given that we tend to use the very same argument against Marxism.

### THE FRENCH

The French side was well represented with Jean-Pierre Centi a very effective speaker and provided an excellent commentary on Gary Becker and Mario Rizzo's talks. Gérard Bramouille and Philippe Nemo discussed Hayek's work in relation to Karl Popper and Aristotle respectively. Subjects which, of course, aren't taught in any British university.

Professor Bertrand Lemennicier gives classes on economics to one of the *grande écoles*, he's a very good lecturer and very sharp. He suggested that econometrics should be removed completely from the economics curriculum. He claims to refuse to teach the subject. Having been drafted in to chair a debate on reforms of the judiciary in France, he opened up the session with a proposal: "abolish all the law codes and make everything tort law".

Philippe Nemo was probably the best orator of the French speakers. He reminded me of my excellent economics teacher at the French Lycée in London. Unfortunately his ability to produce an enthralling talk at high-speed for ten, twenty or thirty minutes without hesitation or notes meant that the translators were lost. English speakers were unable to appreciate what he was saying. One of Professor Nemo's interventions touched on his opposition to the "Pax", a state scheme for registering partnerships short of marriage which would in practice be mainly aimed at homosexual relationships. Nemo's objection to this scheme was based on the notion that further reducing the costs of marriage break-ups would be to undermine the family as a social institution. He referred to homosexual partnerships as inherently having low costs of breaking up because of the absence of children. This emerged from the translation booth as a statement to the effect that all homosexual relationships were unstable and cheap. It was hardly surprising that a couple of Swedish libertarians took exception to that, particularly as they claimed that in Sweden, family break-up isn't regarded as the social disaster that it is in North America, the UK and France. What this says about Swedish society isn't clear.

### TRANSLATION DIFFICULTIES

Generally the translation system tended to break down when French was spoken, a reflection on the speed with which the language is properly spoken. Even the precaution of providing the translators with a copy of the paper in advance didn't completely overcome the problem. As far as I know most of the speakers either didn't use notes, or else didn't make them available in advance. Lord Harris took great pains to ensure that he would be understood. In his presentation of Thatcherism, he began by giving a brief outline of his talk in French, having supplied the translators with a copy of his speech two days in advance. He then deliberately spoke clearly and slowly, often pausing to give the translators a moment's breath. His speech was among the most appreciated of the week, probably because of the relevant subject matter to practically everyone in the room. Lord Harris was seen as a legendary figure for many of the Europeans for his central role in the intellectual struggles of the 1960s and 1970s (he referred more often to Arthur Seldon, the IEA's long-time editorial director). In my view ensuring that the translators got a copy of the text in advance was the single most important lesson to be learnt from the week. Some of the translators didn't seem to follow some of the economic or philosophical jargon. Some speakers, such as Philippe Nemo seemed to provoke such despair that there would be silence from the translators' booth for entire minutes.

## OTHER COMPLICATIONS

Queuing in the university restaurant was the predictable disaster for the first couple of days, given a layout for a self-service canteen that seemed to owe more to the architect's inspiration from Pythagoras's theory of the perfect spheres than to practical use of space. The degree to which Soviet society destroyed politeness in Romania, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Poland compounded the problem. Queuing was not quite a Darwinian exercise, the layout was too eccentric to allow shoving to be a consistently effective way of reaching the food counters. There were two salad counters which sometimes had the same choice and sometimes different. Although bowls ran out frequently, the kitchen staff were quite efficient at restocking. This however tended to dull the effectiveness of any queue jumping. Also, hanging around for a few minutes sometimes led to a new tray coming out. The main courses were served up in a works canteen type of set-up which seemed to employ at least twice as many staff as required. Here the queue jumpers were utterly confused. There was no predictable method of arriving at the counter and being served. On at least one occasion, the same people pushed past me three times and still ended up in the seating area after me. I could never work out if it was grotesque inefficiency or a cunning method of encouraging manners by sheer attrition. After a couple of days, some of the Eastern Europeans simply turned up *before* the crush (entrepreneurship). Others gave up queue jumping once they'd worked out that it wasn't even effective (fatalism). Finally some made an effort not to act like peasants (social climbers).

Accommodation at the Cité universitaire "les Gazelles" was basic enough to invite comparisons with prison. This impression was based on low-ceilinged long corridors, the absence of lifts, the sliding wooden-barred shutter on the window and the bed. The bed was an iron frame with a mattress that looked clean but worn out. Two sheets, a grey blanket and an old bolster (which could have used re-stuffing) was it.

Having said that it was cheap, each room had a sink and it worked out at four or five people per shower and lavatory, which is no doubt luxurious for most students, let alone jailbirds. The sliding shutter offered better security than I got at my British college, it also acted as an effective sun shade. Perhaps I'm not too fussy, but I would have traded this accommodation for some of the prettier student accommodation in Britain. I thought the draconian regulations banning practically any electrical equipment from rooms was either excessive or suggested that the wiring wasn't up to standard. Storage space was much better organised than I remember for equivalent university accommodation. After a day or so, I thought that this type of place would be fine, provided that the doors were secure (they seemed a lot stronger than the flimsy rubbish I've seen in some halls of residence I could name), and provided also that the neighbours weren't crack addicts: no difference from the UK then.

Even allowing for whoever was bankrolling the IES-Europe operation, the scale of the *université d'été* was impressive. Various events organised for the sponsored students, some of which the rest of us managed to gate-crash. The rules appeared to be roughly as follows. Some events were really exclusive. Others were exclusive, but if we found out about them and turned up, there might be a display of disapproval, but it was all right really. Others were exclusive, but the organisers banked on most people getting in anyway. I'm still not able to work which ones were which except for the last night party, which was an "exclusive, but if you can get there without causing a fuss you're welcome" event. I think.

The trick is to not take a too serious view of these things. Some of the organisers were on the verge of a nervous breakdown after four days and nanoseconds away from snapping. I'm told

that some scenes occurred but I didn't witness any. In the circumstances it was telling that the people who got hot and bothered were from Nordic countries and the UK. The Latins — i.e the French, Italians and Romanians — took it all in a positive spirit. There were no Spaniards or Portuguese at all as far as I could tell.

Evening meals were (I think) not meant to be provided by the conference organisers. I know that the East Europeans were given a deal whereby a set menu was available for free at one of the university cafés. I think I accidentally gate-crashed this twice because I ended up not paying for two suppers that I had expected to do so, one of them a very passable paella with fresh prawn and mussels. It would be hard to criticise any university restaurant that offers you free red wine or rosé with your meal. This is probably illegal in Britain, and America too — the so-called "free world" — come to think of it.

The nearest BP filling station did a roaring trade in alcohol until 10pm at supermarket prices (i.e. cheaper than any British supermarket). The bargain red wine cost under £2 (sorry, I forgot the label) and was worth about £4 in the UK. At the filling station I was even sold a spring-lock Laguiole knife which had a corkscrew on it. In Britain I would probably have got three months and a criminal record for carrying it in the boot of my car. Bars and restaurants in France of course open earlier and later than London (although most places in Aix shut at midnight, this being a little provincial town after all). I couldn't figure out how the 35 hour week worked for shops, true many closed for lunch and were shut at least one day a week, but the longer opening hours surely account for this.

The more seedy looking nightclubs were, you guessed it, mock-up English pubs! I refused on principle to stay in the "Queen Victoria, pub anglais", at one in the morning, which served French and German lager, but no bitter at all. It reminded me of the shabbiest pub in Cricklewood when the TV has blown up.

For those who insist on eating out I'm told that a reliable chain called "Bistro Romain" is good value for money and has outlets all over France. Certainly their idea of a *salade niçoise* is a complete meal for about £6. It makes the version served up in London at Pizza Express look like the trimmings off a Big Mac.

## MORE FRENCH LIBERTARIANS IN SENIOR ACADEMIC POSITIONS

The reception held in an exquisite *jardin à la française* which was hosted by the Deputy Mayor of Aix en Provence was a reminder of how difficult it is to assess the impact of libertarian ideas in France. It turns out that the French Liberals have a share in the government of the town council. I got the impression that the reception was held more because Jacques Garello had studied at the University of Algiers (!) with the Deputy Mayor, than because of any particular libertarian sympathy on the part of the local politicians. However, that made the civic reception all the more intriguing. Obviously the town hall regarded the *université d'été* as a welcome part of the city's intellectual life. Please find me a local authority anywhere in the United Kingdom that would welcome a British libertarian conference.

Another thought was that there seemed to be an awful lot of French university professors who were anarcho-capitalists or aligned with Alain Madelin. I think there is a difference in definition, also French universities are organised differently from British ones. Even so, I'm quite sure that there are a lot more French libertarians in senior academic positions compared with their British counterparts. In fact I wouldn't be surprised if the proportion wasn't better than in the USA!

None of the French PhD students spontaneously complained of political bias or harassment, although I didn't get round to asking about the issue. Perhaps I'm over-simplifying, but I

know that a foreigner speaking to a gathering of British libertarian PhD students wouldn't have discussed universities for a couple of hours without a very good chance that the subjects of corruption and harassment would come up.

### THE FRENCH POLITICIANS AND THE FRENCH LIBBOS

Alain Madelin's political party is called *Démocratie Libérale*. Its youth wing is basically of indistinguishable political affiliation to the Federation of Conservative Students at its best (or worst, depending on your point of view). But these are French loony Libbos. They didn't boo the party leader off the stage when he called for compulsory private insurance to replace state provided social security (I nearly did, but thought it wasn't really my place, he is *their* party leader after all). The angry muttering afterwards suggested that they were merely saving up for a future confrontation. FCS claimed 14,000 members in a party of over 600,000. Given the fuss made over less than two per cent of the Tory party's membership, I'm looking forward to the fight between the French youth wing and the seniors, which is more like 20 per cent of Madelin's members! The seniors also have a life expectancy of over ten years, unlike the Tory party, so both sides are evenly matched. I didn't like Madelin's talk much and I liked the interview he gave *Le Figaro* even less, in which he called for an end to criticism of Jacques "Couillon" Chirac. All right Madelin makes William Hague look like a British Liberal Democrat, and it surely must count for something that he has cornered the young libertarian market in France.

I could see their point after the second politico turned up a day late. I decided that coffee with a trio of Swedish libertarians who had celebrated France's relatively enlightened alcohol licensing laws and tax levels would be more productive than listening to the hack. I'm glad I turned up late for the Charles Million speech. I had to stand outside the hall for the speech which ensured that when I started holding my head in disbelief I didn't cause a scene in the conference room. For foreigners who haven't grasped the intricacies of French politics there were approximately ten right-wing political parties in France. Charles Million remarked that this disunion made it easier for the Socialists to form a majority with the help of the MRG (once the formidable Radical Party), the Communists and one of the two or three Green parties. So far so good. His solution however was to set up a new party called "La Droite" (The Right). I don't believe that he has as many members as the Independent Libertarian Party. He repeated Madelin's call for all the libertarians to shut up until after the elections of 2001 or 2002. They would tell the electorate about policies afterwards ... He got about as much applause from the Bulgarians who didn't understand a word he said as he did from the young French liberals and libertarians. I only clapped a couple of times because I realised that I'd been hopping around saying "Quel con!" after nearly every sentence of Million's speech whilst standing next to his wife. When Lord Harris was asked to reply, instead of endorsing Million's call for the unity of the right, he launched into a tirade about the hopelessness of Conservative Party politicians, whilst never mentioning their pale French imitations. He then gave a ten minute description of how meetings of students and dissident academics had shaped the future Thatcherite MPs, including Michael Portillo. Lord Harris wasn't talking to Charles Million, his words were aimed at the students. His talk was aimed at sustaining their enthusiasm through periods such as the 1950s and 1960s in the UK, which are being experienced in most parts of this continent. He even chose to speak in English as a calculated ploy. He knew that the translators would do a better job from English and most of the Eastern Europeans and the French students would grasp his English better than a garbled translator's rendering.

Even Jacques Garello in his thank-you speech could scarcely hide his contempt for the French right. He said that if the libe-

rals (DL) weren't able to win a sizable vote by 2002 or 2007 (15 to 20 per cent), then the Socialists would probably have to privatise everything anyway, so the liberals/libertarians might as well deal with "le Tony Blair français" then. Implicitly, Garello was saying that any changes in France would come from what Harris had described in an earlier speech as "the second-hand peddlers of ideas" (quoting Hayek). Charles Million, needless to say was shaking his head furiously at this point, whilst smiling in splendid politician fashion, in case a photographer caught a snapshot of him frowning.

After this session, I got asked by some French students to go through the sequence of Mrs Thatcher's reforms (including the ones that didn't work). They didn't want the authorised version, they wanted an idea of just how bad Britain was in 1978, and what the hell Mrs Thatcher did about it. The sketchy outline I gave before promising to come back to France later in the year to discuss the matter further prompted more than one remark that "La France est comme l'Angleterre aux années 70s!". I had the feeling that I might just be witnessing one of those historic moments, like when the Wandsworth Council Tories got shouted at by a secretary and ordered to go forth and win the 1978 local elections. The bit that you had to be there to appreciate is that most of these youngsters had the utmost contempt for "Two-Jags" politicians. They'd gladly *not* be politicians, or if they had to, would want to get their job done and then get back out into the real world. We spent as much time discussing the merits of the current French soccer team, which of the Americans were gay and which of the Romanians had the best singing voice.

### ALL LOST? OR EVERYTHING TO PLAY FOR?

The French loved quoting some anecdote of Hayek's in which he claimed that for France to go liberal, the rest of the world would have done so for years. This prophecy cast a gloom on their deliberations. As usual on specific issues with Hayek, I disagree. The point is worth considering however, that to an outsider, France shows little evidence of a thriving libertarian movement.

Yet here we have the twenty-second annual gathering of three to four hundred people, many of whom have never been here before. Is that 4,500 new faces? And about half of them French? And extracts get broadcast on a national radio station?

The pessimists want it both ways. "We're losing!" they wail in their countless multitudes. "See! There are thousands of people who agree with me." It's as if they've just woken up to the death of Gladstone, history since being a bewildering series of ghastly events one after the other.

But that isn't our starting point. Our side has won the great intellectual battle of the twentieth century. Totalitarian socialism is a discredited method of organising society. There are two parallel debates underway. The first is between humanism and various mystical creeds (some of which are religious, but neither all mysticism is religious nor are all religions based on a mystical epistemology). The second is between moderate state interventionists and anarcho-capitalists. Most of the participants in the second debate are allies in the first one. The BBC employee who produces programmes in favour of environmental panic doesn't literally want to see the establishment of the cult of Gaia and the elimination of all technology. He will oppose us on almost everything except state censorship of BBC reporting and cuts in the BBC budget because we're "moving towards a more sustainable mode of production".

"Victory" is therefore hard to define. It may not be apparent this side of a catastrophic collapse in the world's welfare states. A pessimist will therefore jump to the conclusion that "All is lost!" when in fact everything is still to play for.

Maybe, just maybe.