



FOUR STRATEGIES FOR LIBERTARIAN CHANGE

MURRAY N. ROTHBARD



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Notes

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FOR LIFE, LIBERTY AND PROPERTY

Four Strategies For Libertarian Change

Murray N. Rothbard

The creed of *laissez-faire* - individual liberty, inviolate rights of property, free markets, and minimal government - is virtually bound to be a radical one. That is, this libertarian creed is necessarily set in profound conflict with existing forms of polity, which have generally been one or another variety of statism. In this paper, we concentrate, not on examining or justifying the *laissez-faire* doctrines of various thinkers, but, given those doctrines, on how these writers and theorists proposed to try to bring about their ideal polity. In short, having adopted a profoundly radical creed at odds with the ruling dogmas of their day, what, if anything, did these theorists offer as a strategy for social change in the direction of liberty? We are familiar with how Marx and the Marxists met this challenge of how to proceed in the direction of a radical ideal. How did *laissez-faire* thinkers meet their own particular challenge, in some ways similar and in some ways quite different? In this paper, we do not presume to be comprehensive; we select several important *laissez-faire* intellectuals and groups of intellectuals over the centuries, and see what solutions they could offer to the problem of libertarian social change.

To their credit, the Marxists have spent an enormous amount of their time and energy grappling with problems of strategy and tactics, much more so than have *laissez-faire* thinkers. On the other hand, the libertarians have not enjoyed the luxury of a readily identifiable social class to ordain as the preferred agent of change (the “proletariat” for classical Marxists; the peasantry for Leninists-Maoists, and the lumpenproletariat and the “student class” for the short-lived New Left in the United States in the late nineteen sixties.) Neither did the libertarians have the comfort of knowing that their triumph has been made inevitable by the “scientific laws of history”, and by the irresistible if murky workings of the materialist dialectic.

All new, radical ideas and ideologies begin necessarily with one or a handful of lone intellectuals, and so through history such intellectuals, finding themselves in possession of a radical political creed, have realised that, if social change is ever to occur, the process must begin with themselves. Most classical liberal or *laissez-faire* activists have adopted, perhaps without much thoughtful consideration, a simple strategy that we may call “educationalism”. Roughly: we have arrived at the truth, most people are deluded believers in error; therefore, we must educate these people - via lectures, discussions, books, pamphlets, newspapers, or whatever - until they become converted to the correct point of view. For a minority to become a majority, a process of persuasion and conversion must take place: in a word, through education.

To be sure, there is nothing wrong with this strategy so far as it goes. All new truths or creeds, be they scientific, artistic, religious, or political, must proceed in roughly this way: the new truth rippling out from the initial discoverers to disciples and protégés, to writers and journalists, to intellectuals and the lay public.¹ By itself, however, pure educationalism is a naive strategy, for it avoids pondering some of

the difficult problems, e.g.: how are we to confront the problem of Power? Do we have to convert a large majority, a narrow one, or merely a critical mass of an articulate and dedicated minority? And if we perform such a conversion, what will happen to the State? Will it wither away (or wither to an ultraminimal nugget) by itself, as it were automatically? And are there one or more groups that we should concentrate on in our agitation? Should we invest our necessarily scarce resources on a more likely group of converts rather than another? Should we be consistent and out-front in our agitation, or should we practice the arts of deception until we are ready to strike? Are we most likely to make gains in one state of affairs in society rather than another? Will economic, military, or social crisis benefit our movement or hurt it? None of these problems is an easy one, and unfortunately the general run of *laissez-faire* thinkers and activists have devoted very little time to considering, let alone solving, them.

In this essay, we consider some outstanding *laissez-faire* intellectuals of the past, and how they went about pondering the problems of social change. And, in particular, as intellectuals, what they thought the role of such intellectuals (perhaps including themselves) should be in fostering such change.

1. Retreatism: Taoism in Ancient China

The first libertarian intellectual was Lao Tzu, the founder of Taoism. Very little is known about his life, but apparently he was a contemporary and personal acquaintance of Confucius in the late sixth century B.C., and like the latter came from the state of Sung and was descended from the lower aristocracy of the Yin dynasty. Unlike the notable apologist for the rule of philosopher-bureaucrats, however, Lao Tzu developed a radical libertarian creed. For Lao Tzu the individual and his happiness was the key unit and goal of society. If social institutions hampered the individual’s flowering and his happiness, then those institutions should be reduced or abolished altogether. To the individualist Lao Tzu, government, with its “laws and regulations more numerous than the hairs of an ox”, was a vicious oppressor of the individual, and “more to be feared than fierce tigers”. Government, in sum, must be limited to the smallest possible minimum; “inaction” was the proper function of government, since only inaction can permit the individual to flourish and achieve happiness. Any intervention by government, Lao Tzu declared, would be counterproductive, and would lead to confusion and turmoil. After referring to the common experience of mankind with government, Lao Tzu came to this incisive conclusion: “the more artificial taboos and restrictions there are in the world, the more the people are impoverished ... The more that laws and regulations are given prominence, the more thieves and robbers there will be.”

The wisest course, then, is to keep the government simple and for it to take no action, for then the world “stabilises itself”. As Lao Tzu put it: “Therefore the Sage says: I take

no action yet the people transform themselves, I favour quiescence and the people right themselves, I take no action and the people enrich themselves ...”

Lao Tzu arrived at his challenging and radical new insights in a world dominated by the power of Oriental despotism. What strategy to pursue for social change? It surely was unthinkable for Lao-Tzu, with no available historical or contemporary role model for libertarian social change, to set forth any optimistic strategy, let alone contemplate forming a mass movement to overthrow the State. And so Lao Tzu took the only strategic way out that seemed open to him: counselling the familiar Taoist path of withdrawal from society and the world, of retreat and inner contemplation.

I submit that while contemporary Taoists advocate retreat from the world as a matter of religious or ideological principle, it is very possible that Lao Tzu called for retreat not as a *principle*, but as the only despairing strategy that seemed open to him. If it was hopeless to try to disentangle society from the oppressive coils of the State, then he perhaps assumed that the proper course was to counsel withdrawal from society and the world as the only way to escape State tyranny.⁷

That retreat from the State was a dominant Taoist objective may be seen in the views of the great Taoist Chuang Tzu (369 - circa. 286 B.C.) who, two centuries after Lao-Tzu, pushed the master's ideas of laissez-faire to their logical conclusion: individualist anarchism. The influential Chuang Tzu, a notable stylist who wrote in allegorical parables, was a highly learned man in the state of Meng, and also descended from the old aristocracy. A minor official in his native state, Chuang Tzu's fame as a writer spread far and wide throughout China, so much so that King Wei of the Ch'u kingdom sent an emissary to Chuang bearing great gifts and urging him to become Wei's chief minister of state. Chuang Tzu's scornful rejection of the king's offer was one of the great declarations in history on the evils underlying the glittering trappings of State power; it was a fitting declaration from the world's first anarchist:

“A thousand ounces of gold is indeed a great reward, and the office of chief minister is truly an elevated position. But have you, sir, not seen the sacrificial ox awaiting the sacrifices at the royal shrine of state? It is well cared for and fed for a few years, caparisoned with rich brocades, so that it will be ready to be led into the Great Temple. At that moment, even though it would gladly change places with any solitary pig, can it do so? So, quick and be off with you! Don't sully me, I would rather roam and idle about in a muddy ditch, at my own amusement, than to be put under the restraints that the ruler would impose. I will never take any official service, and thereby I will satisfy my own purposes.”

Chuang Tzu reiterated and embellished Lao Tzu's devotion to laissez-faire and opposition to state rule: “There has been such a thing as letting mankind alone; there has never been such a thing as governing mankind [with success].” In fact, the world simply “does not need governing; in fact it should not be governed.” Chuang Tzu was also the first to work out the idea of “spontaneous order”, developed particularly by Proudhon in the nineteenth and by F. A. Hayek of the Austrian School in the twentieth century. Thus: “Good order results spontaneously when things are let alone.”

Chuang Tzu, moreover, was perhaps the first theorists to see the State as a brigand writ large: “A petty thief is put in jail. A great brigand becomes a ruler of a State.” Thus, the only difference between State rulers and out-and-out robber chieftains is the size of their depredations. This theme of ruler-as-robber was to be repeated, independently of course, by Cicero and then by St. Augustine and other Christian thinkers in the Middle Ages.³

2. La Boetie:

Philosopher and Strategist of Civil Disobedience.

The first modern libertarian political philosopher was a young aristocrat of the mid sixteenth century, Etienne de La Boetie (1530-1563). La Boetie's father was a royal official in the Perigord region in southwestern France, while his mother was the sister of the president of the Bordeaux Parlement. Orphaned at an early age, Etienne was brought up by his uncle and namesake, the curate of Bouilhonnas. Receiving his law degree from the University of Orleans in 1553, La Boetie promptly gained a royal appointment to the Bordeaux Parlement, where he pursued a distinguished career as judge and diplomat until his untimely death in 1563, at the age of thirty-two. La Boetie was also known as a distinguished poet and humanist, translating Xenophon and Plutarch, and closely connected with the Pleiade, the leading group of young poets in France.

There was nothing libertarian about La Boetie's public career. Indeed, shortly before he died, he wrote but did not publish a manuscript, a “Memoir Concerning the Edict of January 1562”, in which La Boetie urged the French State to punish Protestant leaders as rebels, and to enforce Catholicism upon France.⁴

La Boetie's great contribution to libertarian thought came while he was an unhappy law student, going through the 16th century analogue of a modern bohemian or “hippie” period of discontented youth. In addition, the University of Orleans in that era was going through an intellectually exciting era of free inquiry and religious ferment. La Boetie's major mentor at the university was the fiery Anne du Bourg, not yet a Protestant but tending rapidly in that direction; only six years after La Boetie's graduation, du Bourg was to become a Huguenot martyr, burned at the stake for heresy. It was in this period of ferment that La Boetie composed his brief, but scintillating, profound and deeply radical *Discourse of Voluntary Servitude (Discours de la Servitude Volontaire)*. The *Discourse* was never published by La Boetie, but circulated widely in manuscript, *samizdat* form, and gained considerable fame in Perigordian intellectual circles.⁵

In the first place, a century before Hobbes and Locke, La Boetie used abstract, deductive reasoning to argue for the absolute, universal natural rights of liberty for every individual. Whereas the later radical Huguenot monorchomachs of the 1570s and 1580s used narrowly legal and historical arguments on behalf of French liberties, La Boetie dealt in timeless and general principles discoverable by reason, taking his historical examples solely from classical antiquity.

Secondly, La Boetie widened the classical and medieval concept of “tyranny” from vaguely defined one-man misrule to any State that violated the natural rights of the individual.

Moreover, in another outstanding contribution, “tyranny” was broadened from the misrule of one despot, to a State apparatus that serves the despot and shares in the privileges and exactions of State rule.

Third and most significant, La Boetie, two centuries before David Hume, saw that all tyranny, regardless how coercive or despotic, must rest in the long-run on the consent of the majority of the people, since neither one man nor even a minority constituting the State apparatus can physically coerce the majority for very long. While, as la Boetie pointed out, every State rule originated in coercion and conquest, for the rule to *remain* in power there must be consent by the general public.

If, then, State tyranny is kept in power by popular consent, the way to get rid of that power, the strategy for the achievement of liberty, becomes crystal clear. For the first time in the history of political thought, La Boetie concluded that the way to get rid of State tyranny is simple; a mass refusal to obey the orders of the State, especially the payment of the State’s coerced taxes and exactions. There is no need to overthrow tyrants by force, La Boetie pointed out: “Obviously there is no need of fighting to overcome this single tyrant, for he is automatically defeated if the country refuses consent to its own enslavement.” All that need happen is for the tyrants to be deprived of the public’s continuing supply of funds and resources. If they “are simply not obeyed,” the tyrants become “undone and as nothing.” La Boetie stirringly exhorts the “poor, wretched, and stupid peoples”, blind to their own good, deprived and plundered of their properties and homes, to cast off their chains by refusing to supply the tyrants any further with the instruments of their own oppression. The tyrant, he points out, has

“nothing more than the power that you confer upon him to destroy you. Where has he acquired enough eyes to spy upon you, if you do not provide them yourselves? How can he have so many arms to beat you with, if he does not borrow them from you? The feet that trample down your cities, where does he get them if they are not your own? How does he have any power over you except through you?”

The answer, then, is not upheaval and bloodshed, but merely “willing to be free”. In short:

“Resolve to serve no more, and you are at once freed. I do not ask that you place hands upon the tyrant to topple him over, but simply that you support him no longer; then you will behold him, like a great Colossus whose pedestal has been pulled away, fall of his own weight and break in pieces.”⁶

But if tyranny necessarily rests on popular consent, *why* do the masses customarily give such consent, and thereby support their own misery and destruction? Logically, then, La Boetie was led to what he considered the central problem of political theory: what we might call “the mystery of civil obedience”. Or, why in the world do people continue to consent to their own enslavement? Why do people, in all times and places, obey the commands of a small minority of society that constitutes the government? Why, La Boetie cries out in anguish, why, when reason teaches us the justice of natural rights and equal liberty for all, why, when even animals display a natural instinct to be free, is man, “The only creature really born to be free, [lacking] the memory of his original condition and the desire to return to

it?”⁷ Why, in short, are people steeped in such a “vile” and “monstrous vice” as consenting to their own subjection?

La Boetie answers first, that the difficult act of initially establishing tyrannical State power is accomplished through some form of conquest, either by a foreign power, an internal coup, or by the use of a wartime emergency as an excuse to fasten a permanent despotism upon the public. And why then do people continue to consent?

In the first place, explains La Boetie, there is the insidious power of habit, which quickly accustoms and inures the public to any institution, including its own enslavement.

“It is true that in the beginning men submit under constraint and by force; but those who come after them obey without regret and perform willingly what their predecessors had done because they had to. This is why men born under the yoke and then nourished and reared in slavery are content, without further effort, to live in their native circumstance, unaware of any other state or right, and considering as quite natural the condition into which they are born ...”

Thus, humanity’s natural drive for liberty is overpowered by the force of custom, “for the reason that native endowment, no matter how good, is dissipated unless encouraged, whereas environment always shapes us in its own way ...” Hence, people will

“grow accustomed to the idea that they have always been in subjection, that their fathers lived in the same way; they will think they are obliged to suffer this evil, and will persuade themselves by example and imitation of others, finally investing those who order them around with proprietary rights, based on the idea that it has always been that way.”⁸

And so consent of the public need not be eager or enthusiastic, but rather of the resigned “death and taxes” variety. But secondly, the State apparatus need not wait for the slow workings of custom; consent can also be engineered. La Boetie proceeds to discuss the various devices by which rulers engineer such consent. One time-honoured device is circuses, for the entertainment of the masses:

“Plays, farces, spectacles, gladiators, strange beasts, medals, pictures and other such opiates, these were for ancient peoples the bait toward slavery, the price of their liberty, the instruments of tyranny. By these practices and enticements the ancient dictators so successfully lulled their subjects ... that the stupified peoples, fascinated by the pastimes and vain pleasures, ... learned subservience as naively, but not so creditably, as little children learn to read by looking at bright picture books.”⁹

Another important device for gaining the consent of the public is duping them into believing that the rule of the tyrant is wise, just and benevolent. In modern times, La Boetie notes, rulers “never undertake an unjust policy, even one of some importance, without prefacing it with some pretty speech concerning public welfare and common good.” Reinforcing ideological propaganda is deliberate mystification. Thus, the ancient kings set up the idea in the minds of the public that they were above ordinary humans and close to gods. Symbols of mystery and magic were woven around the Crown, so that “by doing this they inspired their subjects with reverence and admiration.”

Sometimes, tyrants have gone so far as to impute to themselves the very status of divinity. In this way, “tyrants, in order to strengthen their power, have made every effort to train their people not only in obedience and servility towards themselves, but also in adoration.”¹⁰

Circuses, specious ideology, mystery; in addition to these purely propagandistic devices, rulers have used another stratagem to obtain the consent of their subjects: purchase by material benefits, bread as well as circuses. The distribution of largesse to the people is a particularly cunning method of duping them into believing that they benefit from tyrannical rule. For

“the fools did not realise that they were merely recovering a portion of their own property, and that their ruler could not have given them what they were receiving without having first taken it from them ... The mob has always behaved in this way - eagerly open to bribes.”¹¹

Finally, La Boetie comes to another highly important and original contribution to political theory: the broadening of the concept of tyranny from one man to an entire State apparatus. This is the establishment, as it were, by permanent and continuing purchase of a stable hierarchy of subordinate allies, a loyal band of retainers, praetorians and bureaucrats. La Boetie considers this factor “the mainspring and secret of domination, the support and foundation of tyranny.” For here is a large sector of society that is not merely duped with occasional negligible handouts from the State; but who make a handsome and permanent living out of the proceeds of despotism. Hence, *their* stake in despotism is not dependent on illusion, habit, or mystery, but is all too great and real. In this way, an elaborate hierarchy of patronage from the fruits of plunder is created and maintained. A large number of men thus permeate down through the ranks of society, and “cling to the tyrant by this cord to which they are tied.” In short, “all those who are corrupted by burning ambition or extraordinary avarice, these gather around him and support him in order to have a share in the booty and to constitute themselves petty chiefs under the big tyrant.” It is true that they, too, are subjects and suffer at their leader’s hands, but in return for that subjection, these subordinates are permitted to oppress the remainder of the public.¹²

On deeper reflection, then, the strategy for the achievement of liberty is not so simple; for even though mass civil disobedience is the master key, how is the public to be brought to such an action, blinded as they are by a network of habit, propaganda, and special privilege? But La Boetie does not despair. For one thing, not *all* the public is deluded or sunk into habitual submission. Environment may influence, but it does not determine; for, in contrast to “the brutish mass”, there is always a more percipient remnant, an elite who will understand the reality of the situation: “there are always a few, better endowed than others, who feel the weight of the yoke and cannot restrain themselves from attempting to shake it off.” These are people who possess clear and farsighted minds, who will never disappear from the earth: “Even if liberty had entirely perished from the earth, such men would invent it.” It is true that rulers invariably attempt to control and suppress genuine education in their realms, depriving the elite of freedom of speech and action, and thereby of making converts. But still, there are always heroic leaders who can arise from the mass, leaders who

will not fail “to deliver their country from evil hands.” This knowledgeable and valiant elite, then, will form the vanguard of the revolutionary resistance movement. Through a process of educating and rousing the public to the truth, they will give back to the people knowledge of the blessings of liberty and expose the myths and illusions fostered by the State. Furthermore, they will be helped, as La Boetie indicates, by the fact that even the privileged courtiers and favorites lead miserable, cringing lives, and that therefore at least some of them will join popular resistance, and thereby split the ruling elite.¹³

Etienne de La Boetie was therefore the first modern libertarian theorist, who also and remarkably offered a strategic theory that stemmed logically from his analysis of the groundwork of State power. But what did he personally do about it? Did he, to use Marxian jargon, unite theory and praxis in his own life?

Certainly not; ironically, La Boetie demonstrated that he may have been a member of a knowledgeable elite but scarcely a valiant one. Not publishing the *Discourse*, he took his appointed place in the ruling elite; and as Professor Keohane states, “Whether he ever mused on the irony of finding himself a prominent part of the network he had once condemned so scathingly, we cannot know.”¹⁴

It is not uncommon, of course, for ardently radical university students to settle quickly into a comfortable and respectable conservatism once entrenched in the privileges and emoluments of the *status quo*. But there is a bit more here than that. For even the brilliantly radical argument of the *Discourse* contained the seeds of its own decay. The very abstractness and universality of its methodology, the failure to apply the doctrine to concrete conditions of sixteenth century France, meant that when La Boetie’s own interests shifted inevitably from the abstract to the concrete in his busy adult career, it was all too easy for him to drop his youthful and abstract radicalism. His original failure to integrate theory and practice, general doctrine and concrete application, paved the way for the theory’s demise, at least in La Boetie’s own life.

But the ultimate fate of the *Discourse* furnished a counter-irony. For if his abstract method permitted La Boetie to abandon his radicalism swiftly in the concrete realm, it had an opposite effect on later readers. Its very timelessness made the work eternally available to be applied concretely in a radical manner to later institutions and generations. Thus, the *Discourse* was first published, not by La Boetie or his heirs or assigns, but anonymously and incompletely in the radical Huguenot pamphlet *Le Reveille-Matin des Francois* (1574) probably written by a member of the late Admiral Coligny’s staff with the collaboration of the great Calvinist Theodore Beza. The full text of the *Discourse*, this time with the author’s name included, appeared for the first time two years later, in a collection of radical Huguenot essays compiled by a Calvinist minister at Geneva, Simon Goulart.¹⁵

La Boetie’s close friend, the essayist Michel de Montaigne, who had intended to publish the *Discourse* himself, was furious at its appropriation by the radical Huguenots. Montaigne now refused to carry on his project, and, to counter the Huguenots, launched a disinformation campaign, claiming that this friend had only been eighteen, and then finally sixteen, years old when he wrote the essay. In that way, Montaigne could defuse the embarrassing radicalism of the

Discourse by passing it off as a juvenile though precocious flight of rhetorical fancy, meaningless in content. And even the Huguenots used the radical pamphlet somewhat gingerly. It is true that the Huguenot pamphlet *La France Turquie* (1575) picked up La Boetie's call for mass civil disobedience by advocating an association of towns and provinces to refuse to pay all taxes to the State. But, overall, as Laski wittily wrote, "Attractive as was the spirit of La Boetie's essay, avowed and academic republicanism was meat too strong for the digestion of the time. Not that La Boetie was entirely without influence; but he was used as cautiously as an Anglican bishop might, in the [eighteen] sixties, have an interest in Darwinism."¹⁶

Almost completely forgotten in the more peaceful days of seventeenth century France, the *Discourse* became known, though not very influential, in the eighteenth century by being printed as a supplement to Montaigne's essays. Unsurprisingly, however, the *Discourse* found its *metier* in the stormy times of the French Revolution, when it was twice reprinted. The fiery Abbe de Lamennais later reprinted the *Discourse* with a "violent" preface of his own, and the same was done by another writer in 1852 to strike back against the *coup d'etat* of Napoleon III. Later in the nineteenth century, La Boetie's essay inspired the non-violent wing of the anarchist movement. Indeed, Leo Tolstoy, in setting forth his doctrine of civil disobedience and non-violent anarchism, cited a lengthy passage from the *Discourse* as the focal point for the development of his argument. Furthermore, Tolstoy's *Letter to a Hindu*, which played a central role in shaping Gandhi's thinking towards mass non-violent action, was heavily influenced by La Boetie.¹⁷ In the early twentieth century, the leading German anarchist Gustav Landauer, after becoming converted to a pacifist approach, made a rousing summary of La Boetie's *Discourse* the central core of his work, *Die Revolution* (1919). And the leading Dutch pacifist-anarchist of the twentieth century, Bartelemy de Ligt, devoted several pages of his *Conquest of Violence* to discussion and praise of the *Discourse*, and translated it into Dutch in 1933.¹⁸ Thus, as the centuries went on, the speculative doctrines of the young Orleans law student were able to take posthumous revenge upon the respectable and eminent official of the Bordeaux Parlement.¹⁹

3. Converting the Monarch: Revolution from the Top

Retreatism was a counsel of despair rather than a strategy, while mass civil disobedience seemed to appeal only to a heroic minority. Neither appeared to be a viable strategy for social change toward liberty and *laissez-faire*. The victory of the centrist *politiques* at the end of the sixteenth century in France paved the way for a growing and centralising royal absolutism. And that absolutism grew apace with the crushing of the Fronde and other popular rebellions during the mid-seventeenth century. Finally, absolutism reached its apogee in the reign of the Sun King, Louis XIV. Opposition to royal absolutism and mercantilist statism began to develop in the 1680s and 1690s among merchants, aristocrats, leading bureaucrats, churchmen and theorists.

A new and more pragmatic viewpoint began to develop. Why not abandon the fruitless idea of organising mass opposition to the king? Why not short-circuit the problem of social change by converting the king, and have him impose liberty from the top down, thus avoiding any radical change in the nation's political institutions? To effect this strategy,

the new oppositionists and libertarians had to employ basically utilitarian arguments. Even proponents of natural rights, such as the Physiocrats in the mid and latter eighteenth century, employed utilitarian arguments to convince the king and the ruling aristocracy of the overriding importance of such rights. Basically, the theme, employing both natural rights and free market approaches, was that property rights and *laissez-faire* would benefit the entire nation, would advance the happiness and prosperity of everyone. And if the nation would benefit, so too would the king.

(a) Archbishop Fenelon and the Burgundy Circle

One of the most influential centres of libertarian opposition to the absolutism of Louis XIV was headed by the highly devout François de Salignac de la Mothe, Archbishop Fenelon of Cambrai (1651-1715). Fenelon was a friend and student of Abbe Claude Fleury (1640-1723) who, as a young theologian, had launched the anti-statist opposition in the early 1670s. Young Fenelon found that he could exercise maximal influence on the Court by getting appointed to the post of religious confessor and instructor to the king's top mistress, the Madame Françoise d'Aubigne, the Marquise de Maintenon (1635-1719). From this position during the 1680s, Fenelon got himself appointed in 1689 as preceptor to the royal children, in particular the young Duke of Burgundy, grandson of Louis XIV, who seemed destined one day to be king.

Fenelon's developed strategy to achieve liberty, then, was to organise a group of tutors to the young dauphin, to convert the future king to the libertarian creed, and, then, when he assumed power, to achieve the libertarian revolution from the top down. Assisted by Fleury, Fenelon indeed succeeded in making a disciple of the Duke of Burgundy, and his Burgundy Circle became an active and knowledgeable focus of opposition to the statism and mercantilism of Louis XIV. Fenelon was particularly incensed at the continuing wars, and their attendant crushing burden of taxation and ruin of trade. In an anonymous letter to the king in 1693, which he probably sent only to Madame de Maintenon, Fenelon denounced the unending "bloody" wars, which with their taxes have destroyed trade and crippled the poor, driving the people to desperation, "by exacting from them for your wars, the bread which they have endeavoured to earn with the sweat from their brows."

In his political novel *Telemaque*, written for the instruction of the young duke, Fenelon spoke through Mentor, a wise man among the Phoenicians, who explained to young prince Telemaque how the Phoenicians were able to flourish so remarkably in world trade:

"Above all never do anything to interfere with trade in order to turn it to your views. The Prince must not concern himself with trade for fear of hindering it. He must leave all profits to his subjects who earned them, otherwise they will become discouraged ..."²⁰

The Burgundy Circle seemed close to the achievement of their cherished goals when the Grand Dauphin, son of Louis XIV, died in 1711, and the Duke of Burgundy became first in line for the throne. But tragedy struck only the following year, when the duke, his wife and eldest son were all struck dead of measles. Fenelon wrote to a friend in despair: "Men work by their education to form a subject full of courage and ornamented by knowledge; then God comes along to destroy this house of cards ..."

The sudden and tragic end of the Burgundy Circle illuminated one problem with the idea of converting the king (in this case a future king): if that person dies or disappears, the entire strategy for liberty disappears with it.²¹

(b) Quesnay, Physiocracy, and Turgot

A half-century after Fenelon's attempt, Dr. François Quesnay (1694-1774) organised a movement to convert the existing French king (as well as all others) and not merely a future one. In contrast to Fenelon's search for special influence at court, Dr. Quesnay had achieved his influence before becoming interested in social or economic ideas. A distinguished surgeon and physician, Quesnay had written widely on medicine as well as agricultural technology, his celebrity in medicine earning him the post in 1749 of Personal Physician to the top mistress of King Louis XV, the Madame de Pompadour. From this key position, Dr. Quesnay, a few years later, became personal physician to the king himself.

It was in the late 1750s, in his mid-sixties, that the court physician began to dabble in economic topics. The founding of Quesnay's physiocratic movement may be dated precisely at the moment in July 1757 that the guru met the man who would become his chief adept and propagandist, the restless, flighty, enthusiastic and slightly crackpotty Victor Riqueti, the Marquis de Mirabeau (1715-1789). Mirabeau had just achieved fame by publishing the first several parts of a multi-part work, which promptly became a best-seller, the flamboyant, unsystematic and grandiloquently entitled, *The Friend of Man (L'Ami des Hommes)*.

The fateful meeting of the two meant that the seemingly harmless ruminations of the court physician was now physiocracy, a School of Thought. Bolstered by Quesnay's crucial place at court, and by Mirabeau's fame and energy, physiocracy soon became a formidable and influential school, conducting operations through a succession of journals, as well as by regular Tuesday evening seminars held at the home of Mirabeau. The physiocrats favoured an absolute monarch who would install and enforce a system of absolute and natural property rights for all, as well as its corollary, a laissez-faire economic system. The physiocrats also had a special concern for agriculture, reflecting the interests of their founder, including the view that only land was productive.

In many ways, the physiocratic school became a personality cult for Dr. Quesnay. His followers claimed, with little evidence, that Quesnay looked like Socrates, and they habitually referred to him as the "Confucius of Europe". Indeed, Mirabeau went so far as to proclaim that the three greatest inventions in the history of mankind had been writing, money, and Quesnay's famous diagram, the *Tableau Economique*.

Most physiocratic hopes in politics rested on the formidable figure of Anne Robert Jacques Turgot, the Baron de l'Aulne (1727-1781). But while he was a political ally of the physiocrats in their drive toward free trade and laissez-faire, Turgot was by no means a physiocrat in economic theory. Believing neither in land as the only productive factor nor in the proto-Keynesian *Tableau Economique*, Turgot was in fact a brilliant and creative pioneer in what later would become the "Austrian School" of economics.²²

A. R. J. Turgot was born to a distinguished Norman family of royal officials and administrators, and then took his own place in the top levels of the royal bureaucracy. He learned administration as well as devotion to laissez-faire from his great friend and mentor, Jacques Claude Marie Vincent, the Marquis de Gournay (1712-1759), a successful merchant who then became a royal inspector and minister of commerce. In addition, Turgot reported a family tradition that the phrase "laissez-faire" had been invented by the wealthy Norman merchant, Thomas Le Gendre, a close friend of Turgot's grandparents. When asked how Colbert could best help trade, Le Gendre had replied: "laissez-nous faire".

Turgot's strategy was to rise in the French bureaucracy, and then to effect laissez-faire reforms when he became Controller-General (finance minister). While this depended on conversion of the king, Turgot did not really share the physiocrats' enthusiasm for an absolute king that could establish their reforms. One of Turgot's most incisive epigrams, delivered to a friend, revealed both his political and religious views; "I am not an *Encyclopediste* because I believe in God; I am not an *economiste* [physiocrat] because I would have no king." Turgot had concluded that the best form of government, and the one most likely to lead to laissez-faire and the protection of property rights, was a constitutional republic, "in which all property owners have an equal right to participate in legislation." But in common with his young friend and disciple, the mathematician and *philosophe* Marie Jean Antoine Nicolas de Caritat, the Marquis de Condorcet (1743-1749), Turgot was willing to settle for influencing and converting an existent monarch. As Condorcet's biographer writes, "the monarchical regime had the great advantage of offering a clear locus of power to be captured for the public good by men of reason and goodwill." The biographer aptly calls this creed a "view of the redemption of monarchical power by reason, this eighteenth century version of the withering away of the state."²³

The laissez-fairists finally got the chance for their noble experiment in 1774, when Turgot was named Controller-General. Turgot gathered about him as top aides a galaxy of ideologues of the movement, including Condorcet and the youngest and last of the major physiocrats, Pierre Samuel Dupont de Nemours (1739-1817). The first act of the new administration was the edict of September 13th, decreeing the freedom of import and export, internal and external, of all grain. The preamble of the edict, drawn up by Dupont, was designed to educate the public on the reasons for this crucial measure. The new free trade policy, declared the preamble, was designed

"to animate and extend the cultivation of the land ... to remove monopoly by shutting out private license in favour of free and full competition, and by maintaining among different countries that communication of exchange of superfluities for necessities which is conformable to the order established by Divine Providence."²⁴

Free trade in grain, however, ran into a storm of protest, from bureaucrats, restrictionists, and the masses of people who clamoured for artificially cheap bread and failed to understand that these price controls brought about the very shortages of bread that drove them to riot and looting.

The undaunted Turgot pressed on, however, with his policy of sweeping laissez-faire reform. Egged on by the eager Condorcet, Turgot presented his Six Edicts, which included

the abolition of the restrictive guilds, and, in particular, the abolition of the infamous *corvées* - the system of forced labor on the State roads. Since the replacement of forced labor by free labor meant an increase of property taxes, the abolition of the *corvées* was bitterly fought by the aristocracy. More ominously, this libertarian reform was resisted and intrigued against by none other than Trudaine de Montigny, head of the Department of Bridges and Roads, and an old friend of and fellow laissez-faire reformer with Turgot. Once Trudaine entered office, he began to feel the tug of bureaucratic interest more than what he admitted was the call of justice. For employing forced and therefore cheap labor was very convenient to the Ministry, making it virtually independent of the limitations of the State's budgetary process.

After a month of fierce debate within the royal council, the Six Edicts were submitted to the Parlement of Paris in early February, 1776. There the edicts, in particular the abolition of the *corvées* and of the guilds, ran into fierce opposition, scarcely mollified by anonymous (but transparent) and fiery pamphlets published by Condorcet, bitterly attacking the *corvées* and raising the explosive question of abolishing the feudal dues. The Parlement defended the existing order in the way that conservatives had traditionally argued against proposals for any substantive radical change, whether coming from libertarians or socialists. Invoking divine sanction and historical precedent, the Parlement denounced "a project stemming from an inadmissible system of equality" and the "uniform yoke of a land tax".²⁵ It makes a great deal of difference, of course, whether the equality sought is of rights or taxation, on the one hand, or of income or wealth on the other.

For a fleeting moment, the king insisted on imposing the Six Edicts by his own absolute authority over the Parlement. But a combination of parliamentary resistance and ministerial intrigue at last did Turgot in, and he was forced to resign in mid-May 1776. The Turgot reforms were promptly quashed by the exuberant defenders of the old statist order. The noble experiment in laissez-faire reform, the "reign of philosophy", was over. From now on there was no drive for reform until the advent of the French Revolution.

The last hope of the philosophes and the physiocrats was now shattered. Turgot's reign was their last flourish. Already, they had begun to slip in influence with Quesnay's loss of interest in physiocracy in the early 1770s, his restless mind moving on to work on mathematics, where he claimed to have solved the age-old problem of squaring the circle. In addition, Quesnay's death in 1774, added to the public smear campaign heaped upon Mirabeau by his wife and children in a bitter family quarrel around the same time as Turgot's ouster, helped shatter the physiocratic movement.

As for the philosophes, the head of their main salon (and the mistress to the great d'Alembert), Mlle. Julie de Lespinasse, warned Condorcet at the beginning of the experiment that "if it is impossible for him [Turgot] to do good we shall be a thousand times more miserable than we were before, because we shall have lost the hope that alone sustain the wretched." And indeed when Turgot fell, Condorcet wrote in despair to his master, Voltaire, "This event has changed the whole of nature for me. I no longer take the same pleasure in this beautiful countryside, where he would have

brought forth happiness ... How far we have fallen, my dear and illustrious master, and from such a height." And so both Turgot and Condorcet retired from public life, Turgot contentedly to his study, and the younger Condorcet reluctantly to the world of academia. As Condorcet remarked to Voltaire, "We have had a fine dream but it was too short. I am going to apply myself again to mathematics and philosophy. But it is comfortless only to be able to work for one's own petty glory, when one has imagined for a while that one was working for the public good."²⁶ Condorcet, of course, returned to the political sphere upon the onset of the French Revolution, with disastrous consequences to himself.

The repeated failures of a century of attempts to convert the absolute monarch of France to laissez-faire indicates a fundamental flaw of this seemingly simple strategy. For is it really true that it is in the king's personal interest to protect the natural rights and freedom of his subjects? Certainly in the short run, and perhaps even in the long-run, the king's revenue (to say nothing of his power) may well be maximised by tyrannically sweating his subjects to attain the greatest possible income for himself and his political favorites and allies. In the final analysis, reliance on the altruism of an absolute monarch seems a very shaky foundation for a strategy for laissez-faire. And if the laissez-faire theorists had put more reliance on the thorny and much longer-run strategy of leading a mass opposition movement from below, it is possible that they would have been able to guide the French Revolution into far more libertarian paths.

4. The Cadre Leading the Mass:

The "Leninism" of James Mill

James Mill (1773-1836) is one of the most neglected and underrated figures in the history of social thought. Son of a poor Scottish shoemaker, Mill studied at Edinburgh under Adam Smith's leading disciple, Dugald Stewart. Though trained for the Presbyterian ministry, Mill failed to find a ministerial post amidst an increasingly fundamentalist and anti-intellectual Scottish climate, and from then until middle age Mill made his way in London as a chronically impoverished free-lance writer. Finally, after writing a mammoth *History of India*, Mill landed a full-time and major post at the East India Company.

James Mill may be designated as the "Lenin", even the "Marx", of the Philosophic Radicals. A cadre leader by temperament and personality, Mill was dedicated, energetic, and prodigiously productive. He wrote important books, journal articles and newspaper articles on virtually every topic concerned with human action, including philosophy, psychology, political science, history, economics, and education. He organised everyone around him, friends, alleged mentors, acquaintances, and his team of Philosophic Radicals in Parliament. He even organised his son in one of the most famous - or infamous feats in the history of education.

His enormous output was fuelled and guided by his magnificently consistent, logical, and lucid mind, which fastened upon a set of hard-core axiomatic principles which he then applied to all of the human sciences as well as to political action. Muddle-headed types have always denounced him, as they have other cadre leaders, as "dogmatic" and "doctrinaire". Mill's triad of basic axioms were utilitarianism, democracy and laissez-faire, and his writing and political

manouvres were pointed toward those principles and objectives.

James Mill is also rare in the history of thought in deliberately *underweighting* his own intellectual achievements. A refreshing trait indeed in a field where many men - e.g. Adam Smith - have been marked by a Columbus Complex! And yet Mill always claimed to be only an humble Number Two man, a “Lenin” to two “Marxes” - Bentham in philosophy and Ricardo in economics. Hence his general dismissal as a mere vulgariser and propagandist to these two great men. Actually, it was Mill, in the course of his close relationship to Bentham as secretary and live-in aide, who pushed the old man into adopting democracy and universal suffrage as the political-philosophic conclusion from his utilitarianism. The former Tory Bentham was ripe for such conversion, having become bitterly disgruntled with the existing aristocratic system for having failed to adopt his bizarre Panopticon scheme, in which a major portion of the British population - the poor, school-children, and prisoners, among others - would be incarcerated in “scientifically” designed concentration and slave labour camps, all for the proprietary benefit of Bentham himself.²⁷ Bentham was therefore ripe for conversion to democracy, where his scheme could do no worse, and might do better.

On Ricardo, recent research is making it clear that Mill was the youngish retired stockbroker’s mentor and master, not only in general intellectual but also in economic matters. And so Mill happily organised his good friend, hectored, cajoled, prodded and bullied him into becoming the “Marx”, the great economist that Mill for some reason did not propose to be. He pestered Ricardo into writing and finishing his *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817), looking over, editing, and probably adding to many drafts of this work. After that, Mill pressed Ricardo into entering Parliament to take an active role among the radicals. It also turns out that Mill, not Ricardo, was probably responsible for much of the Ricardian System itself, including the justly famous Law of Comparative Advantage.²⁸

It is possible that James Mill’s excess of humility was caused, not by psychological traits, but by his financial position vis-à-vis his mentors. It may have been economically prudent for the freelance Scottish immigrant on the brink of poverty to flatter his wealthy friends, Bentham and Ricardo, and to subordinate himself to their allegedly over-riding greatness.

While, as a high official of the East India Company, he could not run for Parliament himself, Mill was the unquestioned cadre leader of the small but important group of ten to twenty Philosophic Radicals who enjoyed a brief day in the sun in Parliament during the 1830s. While the Radicals proclaimed themselves Benthamites, the aging Bentham had little to do personally with the group. Most of the parliamentary Philosophic Radicals had been converted personally by Mill, beginning with Ricardo over a decade earlier, and also including his son John Stuart, who, after Mill’s death in 1836 succeeded his father as Radical leader. James Mill had also converted the official leader of the Radicals in Parliament, the banker and later classical historical George Grote (1794-1871). Grote, a self-educated and humourless man, soon became an abject disciple of James Mill. For Grote, in the words of Professor Joseph Hamburger, all of Mill’s *dicta* “assumed the force and sanction of duties”.

Charismatic, humourless, and didactic, Mill had all the strengths and weaknesses of the modern Leninist cadre type. The Millian circle also included a fiery cadre lady, Mrs. Harriet Lewin Grote (1792-1873), an imperious and assertive militant whose home became the salon and social centre for the Parliamentary Radicals. She was widely known as the “Queen of the Radicals”, and it was of her that Cobden wrote, “had she been a man, she would have been the leader of a party.” Harriet Grote testified to Mill’s eloquence and charismatic effect on his young disciples, most of whom were brought into the Millian circle by his son, John Stuart. A typical testimony was that of William Ellis, a young friend of John’s, who wrote in later years of his experience of James Mill: “He worked a complete change in me. He taught me how to think and what to live for.”

We can now place in better perspective Mill’s famous quasi-brainwashing education of his son, which the bright young lad turned out not to be suited for psychologically. The point is that Mill’s fierce and fervent education of John Stuart was not simply the crotchet of an intellectual father trying out his theories of education; the education was specifically designed to train John for his presumptively vital and world-historical roles as James’ heir and successor as leader of the Radical cadre, the hoped-for new “Lenin”. There was considerable method in the madness.

James Mill’s evangelical Calvinist spirit was tailor-made for his cadre role. During his days as a literary man in London, Mill lost his Christian faith and became an atheist, but, as in the case of many later Calvinist-trained atheist and agnostic intellectuals, he retained the grim, puritanical, crusading habit of mind of the prototypical Calvinist firebrand.²⁹ Mill’s Calvinism was evident in his conviction that reason must keep stern control over the passions - a conviction that hardly fitted well with Benthamite hedonism. Cadre men are notorious puritans, and Mill puritanically disliked and distrusted drama or art; the actor, he complained, is “the slave of the most irregular appetites and passions of his species.” Moreover, painting and sculpture were scorned by Mill - as by centuries of Calvinists - as the lowest of the arts, only serving to gratify a frivolous love of ostentation.

James Mill’s passion for democracy stemmed from his libertarian theory of class analysis and class conflict, an ancestor, in a twisted way, of the more famous but hopelessly inconsistent Marxian one. Mill’s theory, developed in the 1820s and 1830s, was either arrived at independently or was influenced by the earlier French theory of Charles Comte (son-in-law of J. B. Say and no relation to Auguste) and Charles Dunoyer of the 1810s. It is essentially a “two-class” theory of class conflict. The “ruling class” at any particular time is that group which has managed to obtain control of State power; the “ruled class” are those groups who are taxed, regulated, and controlled by the rulers. Class interest, then, is defined by any group’s relation to the State. All classes are harmonious and none conflict within the free market and free society; conflicts only arise in relation to who controls, or who is controlled by, the State.

Whether independent or not, Mill’s analysis was devoid of the rich applications to the history of Western Europe that Comte, Dunoyer, and their young associate, the historian Augustin Thierry, had developed.³⁰ In this area, Mill was only interested in the general theory and in current applications.

James Mill put libertarian class theory with great force and lucidity. All government, he pointed out, is run by a ruling class, necessarily the few, who dominate and exploit the ruled, the many. There are two conflicting classes, he declared, “The first class, those who plunder, are the small number. They are the ruling Few. The second class, those who are plundered, are the great number. They are the subject Many.” Or, as Professor Hamburger sums up Mill’s position: “Politics was a struggle between two classes - the avaricious rulers and their intended victims.”³¹

The great problem of government, then, is how to eliminate this system of plunder, to end the power “by which the class that plunder succeed in carrying on their vocation.”

All groups, Mill contended, tend to act for their selfish interest, so that it is absurd to expect the ruling clique to act altruistically for the public good. Instead, they will use their opportunities for their own gain, which means to loot the Many, and to favor their own or allied special interests against that of the public. Hence, Mill’s habitual use of the term “sinister” interests as against the public good. Hence, too, Mill’s use of the term “the people” to characterise “the subject Many”, since the people have become a ruled class with a common interest in removing oppression by the sinister interests of the rulers. It should be noted, too, that for Mill and the Radicals the public good meant *laissez-faire*, government confined to the minimal functions of police, defence, and the administration of justice.

How then to arrive at the great *desideratum*: to curb or eliminate the plunder of the ruling class? Mill thought he saw the answer:

“The people must appoint watchmen. Who are to watch the watchmen? [The classic problem of political theory.] The people themselves. There is not other resource; and without this ultimate safeguard, the ruling few will be forever the scourge and oppression of the subject many.”

But how are the people themselves to be the watchmen? To this ancient problem Mill provided what is by now a standard answer in the Western world, but still a not very satisfactory one: by all the people electing representatives to do the watching. Hence Mill’s passion for universal suffrage in frequent elections by secret ballot to put an end to the rule of the few, the aristocracy, the ruling elite.

Granted that the reign of The People would displace aristocratic rule, what reason did Mill have for thinking that they would exert their will on behalf of *laissez-faire*? Here his reasoning was ingenious: while the ruling class enjoy in common the fruits of their exploitative rule, The People are a different kind of class: for their only interest in common is getting rid of the rule of special privilege. Apart from that, the mass of the people have no common class interest they could actively pursue by using the State. The interest of the people in ending the rule of sinister interests and ensuring liberty is the universal interest of all.

How then account for the fact that no one can claim that the masses have always championed *laissez-faire*? And, in fact, that the masses have often loyally supported the exploitative rule of the few? Clearly, because the people, in the complex field of public policy, have suffered from what the Marxists would later call “false consciousness”, an ignorance of where their interests truly lie. It was therefore up to the intellectual vanguard, to Mill and his Philosophic Radi-

cals, to educate and organise the masses so that their consciousness would become correct and they would then exert their irresistible strength to bring about democracy and *laissez-faire*.

With radical democracy and universal suffrage set as his long-term goal, Mill, in true Leninist fashion, was willing to settle for a far less but still substantially radical “transition demand” as a way-station: the Reform Bill of 1832, which greatly widened the suffrage to the middle class. To Mill, extension of democracy was more important than *laissez-faire*, since the latter was supposed to be a semi-automatic consequence of the truly fundamental process of dethroning the ruling class and substituting rule by all the people. Indeed, their concentration on democracy led the Radicals, in the 1840s after Mill’s death, to refuse collaboration with the Anti-Corn Law League, despite their agreement on free trade and *laissez-faire*. To the Radicals, free trade was too much of a middle-class movement that detracted from overriding concentration on democratic reform. Ironically, by rejecting this middle-class movement they rebuffed a successful one, and this refusal to support the Anti-Corn Law League in the 1840s helped eliminate Radicalism as a powerful force in British politics.

A tactically brilliant, if morally dubious, example of Mill as successful cadre organiser and maker of history was his role as the major force in driving through the Reform Bill of 1832. Mill was the behind-the-scenes Lenin and master manipulator of the drive for the Reform Bill. His strategy was to play on the fears of the timorous and centrist Whig government, by spreading the myth that the masses were ready to erupt in violent revolution if the bill were not passed. (An early example of what Tom Wolfe recently called “Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers”.) Mill and the Radicals knew full well that no such revolution was in the offing; but Mill, through friends and allies placed strategically in the press, was able to orchestrate a deliberate campaign of deception that fooled and panicked the Whigs into passing the bill. The campaign of lies was waged by important sectors of the press: by the *Examiner*, a leading weekly owned and edited by the Benthamite Radical Albany Fonblanque; by the widely read *Morning Chronicle*, a Whig daily edited by Mill’s old friend John Black, who made the paper a vehicle for the Radicals; and by the *Spectator*, edited by the Benthamite S. Rintoul. The *Times* was also friendly to the Radicals at this point, and the leading Birmingham Radical, Joseph Parkes, owned and edited the *Birmingham Journal*. Not only that: Parkes was able to have his mendacious stories on allegedly revolutionary public opinion in Birmingham printed as factual reports in the *Morning Chronicle* and the *Times*.

A decade-and-a-half after passage of the bill, John Arthur Roebuck, one of Mill’s top aides in the campaign and later a Radical M.P. and historian of the drive for Reform, admitted that:

“to attain our end, much was said that no one really believed; much was done that no one would like to own ... often, when there was no danger, the cry of alarm was raised to keep the House of Lords and the aristocracy generally in what was termed a state of wholesome terror.”

In contrast to the “noisy orators who appeared important” in the campaign, Roebuck recalled, were the “cool-headed, retiring, sagacious, determined men ... who pulled the strings

in this strange puppet-show.” “One or two ruling minds, to the public unknown,” manipulated and stage-managed the entire movement. They “use[d] the others as their instruments ...” And the most cool-headed, sagacious and determined puppet-master of all was James Mill.³²

Ever the unifier of theory and praxis, James Mill paved the way for the organised campaign of disinformation by writing in justification of lying for a worthy end. While truth was important, Mill conceded, there are special circumstances “in which another man is not entitled to the truth.” Men, he wrote, should not be told the truth “when they would make a bad use of it.” Ever the utilitarian! Of course, as usual, it was the Utilitarian who was to decide on the goodness or badness of the other man’s expected use of the knowledge.

Applying his doctrine to politics, Mill escalated his defence of lying. In politics, he asserted that deliberately disseminating “wrong information” is “not a breach of morality, but on the contrary a meritorious act ... when it is conducive to the prevention of misrule. In no instance is any man less entitled to right information, than when he would employ it for the perpetuation of misrule.”

In the later years of the twentieth century, it is impossible to assemble much fervor for a Millian faith in radical democracy and the rule of the masses as a virtually automatic highroad to *laissez-faire*. There is simply too much evidence to the contrary. Perhaps a grave problem is that the very existence of democratic institutions exacerbates the false consciousness of the masses in identifying themselves with the government in all of its actions. The concept “we *are* the government” is far more likely to arise in a democracy than in a monarchy or oligarchy, for all the manifold sins of these other forms of government. Furthermore, the Millian analysis ignores the difference made by the Iron Law of Oligarchy, and by the coercive nature of government itself. So that a ruling class is still bound to emerge even if sanctified by the *form* of the democratic process that leads people to blur the crucial distinction between state and society.

As for the Radicals themselves, they came to a speedy end in the early 1840s. In addition to failure to latch on to the free trade movement, a split among the formerly anti-imperialist Radicals on cracking down on dissent and rebellion in Canada, put an end to Radicalism in politics - especially since John Stuart Mill led the desertion from the Radical cause. Ironically enough, while proclaiming their weariness with politics *per se* and a return to the pursuits of theory and the academy, such Radical leaders as John Mill and the Grotes in reality gravitated with astonishing rapidity toward the cozy Whig centre that they had formerly scorned. Their proclaimed loss of interest in politics was only a loss of interest in politics as an arena for changing the world in the direction of a principled ideal. Perhaps, in the final analysis, the Radical cadre could not long survive the death of their great founder.

5. Epilogue: Lessons for Strategy?

We have presented in this paper various important libertarian intellectuals in history, and their varying ideas of strategy toward the social ideal of liberty and *laissez-faire*. Can we say that any insights or lessons have been obtained for a strategy for social change beyond simply: spread the

word, and hope for the best? Without being dogmatic about strategy, I think we can. Apart from the various insights of our thinkers and writers about the nature of the State and of liberty, we can surely conclude that retreatism, whatever its other consolations, provides no strategy whatever for successful change. And neither, except in special circumstances, does the idea of mass civil disobedience. The only revolutions I can think of that largely succeeded by a tactic and strategy mass of civil disobedience was the Gandhi movement in India and the general strike of 1979 that toppled the Shah of Iran. In both cases the motivation and direction were sectarian and religious, and in neither case was the *result* of the revolution in any conceivable sense either non-violent or libertarian.

The seemingly easy route of converting an absolute monarch (or modern dictator) seems fraught with too much potential for disaster. The underlying flaw is that only royal, or at best top elite, opinion has been won over, without in any sense convincing the public or the masses. A revolution from the top seems doomed as any sort of long-run strategy.

The Millian cadre concept seems the most promising of these strategic lines, but here again considerable caution is in order. Apart from the error of Mill’s hyperoptimism on democracy, all movement cadre seem to fall prey to unpleasant and even counter-productive personality types and actions. There seems to be something in cadre work that attracts or nurtures humorless and puritanical fanatics. Perhaps that could be tempered by conscious efforts to cultivate humour, perspective, and well-rounded colleagues who appreciate sense enjoyment as part of the truly good life. Even libertarian ideological movements in recent years have fallen prey to a cult of personality, of abject surrender to the whims and dictates of a leader, and to a willingness to commit patently immoral acts - such as systematic deception - to advance the cause. And even tiny libertarian ideological movements have sanctioned gross violations of libertarian principle as a method of advancing or maintaining their own wealth or power.

We are left with the basic strategic problem: How can a libertarian movement develop effective cohesion and leadership without falling prey to abject intellectual surrender to a glorified elite?

How can we preserve a life-long commitment and a sense of “protracted struggle” while avoiding single-minded fanaticism and neglect of personal goals? How can we build institutions without losing sight of the libertarian principles and goals for which we build them?

While such problems are extraordinarily difficult to solve, they can never be solved unless they are thought about. While Marxists devote about ninety per cent of their energies to thinking about strategy, and only ten per cent to their basic theories, for libertarians the reverse is true. Very little thought or discussion has been devoted to strategic or tactical problems. Perhaps this paper will stimulate thinking in this vital field.

NOTES

1. On this process, see the classic article by F. A. Hayek, "The Intellectuals and Socialism", in *Studies in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), pp. 178-94.
2. In short, modern Taoists, neglecting the crucial libertarian content of the master's doctrine, may have mistakenly converted a desperate strategy into a matter of high principle.
3. The outstanding work of the Taoist as well as the other schools of ancient Chinese political thought is Kung-chuan Hsiao, *A History of Chinese Political Thought, Vol 1* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979). For more on Chuang Tzu, see Elbert D. Thomas, *Chinese Political Thought* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1927); E. R. Hughes, *Chinese Philosophy in Classical Times* (1942, rev. ed., 1954); and Sebastian de Grazia, ed., *Masters of Chinese Political Thought* (New York: Viking Press, 1973).
4. La Boetie's *Memoir* was long forgotten and lost until recent years. See Donald Frame, *Montaigne: A Biography* (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1965), pp. 72-73, 345.
5. Thus Michel de Montaigne had read the unpublished *Discourse* long before he met La Boetie as a fellow member of the Bordeaux Parlement in 1559. The date of writing the manuscript is not precisely known, but it is most likely, and so accepted by recent authorities, that La Boetie wrote the *Discourse* in 1562 or 1563, at the age of twenty-two. See Frame, *Montaigne*, p. 71; and Pierre Mesnard, *L'Essor de la philosophie politique au XVIe siecle* (Paris: Boivin et Cie, 1936), pp. 390-391.
6. Etienne de La Boetie, *The Politics of Obedience: The Discourse of Voluntary Servitude* (New York: Free Life Editions, 1975), pp. 51-53.
7. La Boetie, *Discourse*, p. 58.
8. La Boetie, *Discourse*, pp. 60-65. As David Hume was to put it two hundred years later: "Habit soon consolidates what other principles of human nature had imperfectly founded; and men, once accustomed to obedience, never think of departing from that path, in which they and their ancestors have constantly trod ..." Hume, "Of the Origins of Government", in *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary* (Oxford University Press, 1963).
9. La Boetie, *Discourse*, pp. 69-70.
10. La Boetie, *Discourse*, pp. 71-75.
11. La Boetie, *Discourse*, p. 70.
12. La Boetie, *Discourse*, pp. 77-80. John Lewis considered this insight to be the most novel and important feature of the *Discourse*. John D. Lewis, "The Development of the Theory of Tyrannicide to 1660", in Oscar Jaszi and Lewis, *Against the Tyrant: The Tradition and Theory of Tyrannicide* (Glencoe, Ill: The Free Press, 1957), pp. 56-57.
13. La Boetie, *Discourse*, pp. 65-68, 79-86.
14. Nannerl O. Keohane, "The Radical Humanism of Etienne de La Boetie", *Journal of Historical Ideas*, 38 (January-March 1977), p. 129.
15. As the third volume of the *Memoires de l'etat de France* (1576). See J. H. M. Salmon, *The French Religious Wars in English Political Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 19n., corrected by Donald R. Kelley, *Francois Hotman: A Revolutionary's Ordeal*, Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 234. For a complete account of the early pirated versions of the *Discourse* used by the Huguenots, see Paul Bonnefon, "Introduction" to his edition of the *Oeuvres Completes d'Estienne de La Boetie* (Paris: J. Rouam et Cie, repr., 1967), pp. xlix-1.
16. Harold J. Laski, "Introduction", *A Defence of Liberty Against Tyrants* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1963), pp. 24-29.
17. Leo Tolstoy, *The Law of Love and the Law of Violence* (New York: Rudolph Field, 1948), pp. 42-45; Bartelemy de Ligt, *The Conquest of Violence* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1938), pp. 105-106.
18. See De Ligt, *Conquest of Violence*, pp. 104-106, 289. Also see George Woodcock, *Anarchism* (Cleveland, OH: World Pub. Co., 1962), p. 432.
19. For more on La Boetie, see Murray N. Rothbard, "Introduction: The Political Thought of Etienne de La Boetie", in La Boetie, *Discourse*, pp. 9-42.
20. Quoted in Lionel Rothkrug, *Opposition to Louis XIV: The Political and Social Origins of the French Enlightenment* (Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 270.
21. For more on the Burgundy Circle see, in addition to Rothkrug, *Opposition, op. cit.*, Nannerl O. Keohane, *Philosophy and the the State in France: The Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 332ff.
22. See the collection of Turgot's economic writings, in addition to thorough introductions and annotations, in P. D. Groenewegen, ed., *The Economics of A. R. J. Turgot* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977).
23. Keith Michael Baker, *Condorcet: From Natural Philosophy to Social Mathematics* (University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 56. Condorcet himself published a life of Turgot in 1787.
24. Quoted in Henry Higgs, *The Physiocrats* (1897, New York: The Langland Press, 1952), p. 62.
25. See Baker, *Condorcet*, p. 72.
26. Baker, *Condorcet*, p. 80.
27. The Panopticon, central to Benthamite political thought and understandably swept under the rug by Bentham's apologists, was utilitarianism to the hilt and beyond, a genuine example of utilitarian trampling on the rights of the individual for the sake of an alleged social utility. On the Panopticon, see the properly sardonic essay of Gertrude Himmelfarb, "The Haunted House of Jeremy Bentham", *Victorian Minds* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), pp. 32-81; Himmelfarb, "Bentham's Utopia: The National Charity Company", *Journal of British Studies*, 10 (November 1970), pp. 80-125; and Douglas Long, *Bentham on Liberty: Jeremy Bentham's Idea of liberty in Relation to His Utilitarianism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977).
28. For Mill's pervasive influence on Ricardo and Ricardian economics, see T. W. Hutchison, "James Mill and Ricardian Economics: A Methodological Revolution?", *On Revolutions and Progress in Economic Knowledge* (Cambridge University Press, 1978). On Mill and the Law of Comparative Advantage, also demonstrating Ricardo's lack of interest in this doctrine, see William O. Thweatt, "James Mill and the Early Development of Comparative Advantage", *History of Political Economy*, 8 (Summer 1976), pp. 207-234.
29. Professor Thomas perceptively writes: "This is why Mill, a sceptic in later life, always got on well with [Protestant] dissenters [from the Anglican Church] ... He may have come to reject belief in God, but some form of evangelical zeal remained essential to him. Scepticism in the sense of non-commitment, indecision between one belief and another, horrified him. Perhaps this accounts for his long-standing dislike of Hume. Before he lost his faith, he condemned Hume for his infidelity; but even when he had come to share that infidelity, he continued to undervalue him. A placid scepticism which seemed to uphold the *status quo* was not an attitude of mind Mill understood." William E. S. Thomas, *The Philosophic Radicals: Nine Studies in Theory and Practice, 1817-1841* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 100.
30. The French theorists developed the insight that Europe had originally been dominated by a ruling class of kings, or of feudal nobility. They believed that with the rise of capitalism and free markets, of "industrialisme", there would be no ruling class, and the class-run State would wither away, resulting in an "classless", Stateless, free society. Saint-Simon was originally a Comte-Dunoyer libertarian, and then in later life he and his followers changed the class analysis while keeping the original categories, to maintain that employers somehow rule or exploit the workers in a free-market wage relationship. Marx adopted the Saint-Simonian class analysis so that Marxism to this day maintains a totally inconsistent definition of class: on Asiatic despotism and feudalism, the old libertarian concept of ruling class as wielder of State power is maintained; then, when capitalism is discussed, suddenly the definition shifts to the employers forming a "ruling class" over workers on the free market. The alleged capitalist class rule over the State is only extra icing on the cake, the "super-exploitation" by an "executive committee" of a ruling class previously constituted on the market. For a brilliant critique of the inconsistencies of Marxian class theory, see Ludwig von Mises, *Socialism* (3rd Ed., Indianapolis, Liberty Classics, 1981), pp. 292-307.
31. Joseph Hamburger, *Intellectuals in Politics: John Stuart Mill and the Philosophic Radicals* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), p. 44. Despite its title, this book deals far more with James than John Stuart.
32. On James Mill as manipulator of the agitation for the Reform Bill, see Joseph Hamburger, *James Mill and the Art of Revolution* (Yale University Press, 1963).

Comment

Dr. Stephen Davies

Murray Rothbard's paper is both useful and necessary. The question of tactics, of 'how to get from here to there', is perhaps the most important one facing libertarians today. It is on this issue that most libertarian argument falls down. The paper correctly notes that education and propaganda is presented by most libertarians as the simple and sufficient answer to the problem of how to effect radical social and political change. As Rothbard says, this activity, while a necessary part of any libertarian strategy, is inadequate of itself and, on the historical evidence, unlikely to be successful. Here the contrast with socialism is illuminating. Some early socialists such as Robert Owen thought that only education was needed to change society: once everyone had truly understood what socialism was they would promptly bring it about. Others like the Frenchman Blanqui believed one mass insurrection to be all that was needed. The great contribution of Marx was to cut through this with his argument that the natural development of capitalist society would inevitably lead to socialism. His theory of revolution was elaborated by various epigones to explain how this would happen and how to unite theory and action (or 'praxis', in Marxist jargon).

Modern libertarian thinkers have not paid much attention to this issue, of how social change can be realised. Much libertarian argument is (in the Marxist sense) utopian, concerned to argue over the details of what libertarian society might be like without mentioning how this desirable state of affairs will come to pass. (Incidentally this omission reveals a wider weakness of much libertarian thought: its lack of an adequate theory of development and social change.) Earlier, in the second half of the nineteenth century, many libertarians (e.g. Herbert Spencer) put forward a teleological model in which civilisation was necessarily developing towards a libertarian end state. As societies became more advanced and complex so social interaction and 'sympathy' became more developed, producing voluntary institutions which made government increasingly redundant. Simultaneously, the replacement of power-based 'status' relationships by contract-based ones and the supersession of natural by voluntary communities transformed society and worked to remove conflict. This optimistic vision of the course of history was already fading by 1914 and was annihilated by the experience of the Great War.

Rothbard examines the strategies which have been advocated and tried by a succession of arguably libertarian intellectuals. The discussion is both wide ranging and thought provoking. Some reactions are specific, others more general. Rothbard identifies the first strategy studied, that of withdrawal, with Taoism. It is good to see this ancient and fascinating tradition of thought recognised for what it is in its political aspect - a form of militant anti-statism. (Incidentally, one of the best reasons for watching that splendid piece of hokum, the TV version of *The Water Margin*, was the selection of Taoist quotes at the start of each episode. My own favorite: "If princes cease to interfere and make laws, in time even the clever people will stop making trouble; do nothing and order will result.") However, this

strategy is not only found in China. Thoreau could also be put into this category. Also, the strategy of withdrawal advocated by the Taoists was not only aimed at the state but also at complex commercial societies. A stress on primitivism and 'the simple life' of self-sufficiency is a central part of this approach.

The second strategy, that of undermining the legitimacy of the state by civil disobedience was a more widespread notion in the 16th century than Rothbard seems to realise. However, it was generally presented as a moderate and limited form of resistance, to be preferred to armed rebellion. What La Boetie did was to transform it into a radical doctrine by presenting it, as Rothbard correctly emphasises, in an abstracted and ahistorical form, so removing all of the restrictions and limits placed round it by his contemporaries. The problem with the civil disobedience approach is that it can only be tried when the state's legitimacy is already weak. It is a useful tactic for the 'last battle' but how do you get to that position? Moreover, effective mass civil disobedience requires a great unanimity of purpose: this is unlikely to survive success or if it does may produce an extremely repressive regime. The paper clearly grasps this point when mentioning the two examples of the successful use of this strategy.

What of the third strategy discussed by Murray Rothbard, that of "converting the prince"? This idea has been used by many, many people of all political persuasions. Even Plato had a go in his role as tutor of the young ruler of Syracuse. Many of these examples demonstrate a point which Rothbard misses: even if the 'prince' is converted, will that really make a difference? The one eighteenth century 'Enlightened Despot' who was converted to the Enlightenment programme, Joseph II of Austria, died a sadly disappointed man with his reforms opposed and obstructed by all sections of society. More recently, a collection of Mandarins and Confucian scholars planned to reform the Chinese Empire by converting the young Kuang Hsu emperor to their ideas. They succeeded and when he reached his majority he enacted all of their measures. None were put into effect and after one hundred days he was arrested by his mother, the infamous Dowager Empress Tsu Hsu and played no further part in history. The example given by Rothbard, that of Turgot, also demonstrates this point. If Louis XVI was an absolute monarch and supported Turgot then why did he not hold a *lit de justice* and enforce the Six Acts? In reality no ruler is truly absolute. As La Boetie had pointed out, and the paper explains earlier, tyranny means not the rule of one man but the domination of civil society by an apparatus of power which involves many people and groups. Even if the 'prince' is converted he will be stopped by the rest of the elite. (On this sort of precedent the prospects of Mr. Gorbachev look bleak. I wouldn't sell him a life assurance policy!)

However I think Murray Rothbard is too gentle in his account of this strategy. It is still the most popular and widely used one among contemporary libertarians. Its modern ex-

ponents accept the point made above but respond by arguing that we must aim to convert not only the 'prince' but the entire elite. This is to be done not simply by direct conversion of key individuals but by transforming the content of public debate and discourse so that they become permeated by libertarian ideas. This is the strategy of groups such as the IEA, the Heritage Foundation and so on. (This *modus operandi* is of course not confined to libertarians - the Webbs were particularly expert exponents.) These groups have been quite successful in following this strategy - but to what effect? The basic difficulty which the paper identifies in this approach still applies: even if the elite is converted at the intellectual level is it in their *interest* to act on their belief? This whole approach grossly exaggerates the power and importance of ideas and underestimates the significance of material interests. There is another problem which Rothbard touches on but does not develop - that of 'necessary deceit'. The modern libertarians, like their eighteenth century forbears, are attempting to realise a fundamental or revolutionary change. However, like the Physiocrats, they are trying to influence the ruling elite and are mainly funded and supported by profoundly conservative individuals and groups, often having a big stake in the *status quo*. If these people realise what libertarians truly believe, or grasp the actual implication of libertarian argument, then you are in big trouble. This has two results. Firstly, the arguments which appeal to conservative interests are emphasised while those which might alarm them (e.g. social radicalism/moral libertarianism) are muted. Secondly, in the modern context, libertarianism is identified as a conservative doctrine which defends established interests and not as a critical one. This is precisely what happened to the libertarian movement of late nineteenth century Britain.

The strategy which gets the most attention in the paper is that which Rothbard associates (correctly) with James Mill and the Philosophic Radicals. Mills is presented in glowing terms as a genius, an *eminence grise* who was responsible for many of the most important political and intellectual developments of the early nineteenth century. Reading this section of the paper, I get the distinct impression that it is the Millian strategy which really excites Rothbard with the other three playing the parts of 'straw men'. However he is clear-sighted enough to realise that this strategy also has its problems. Even so, I feel that this is by far the weakest section of the paper, for two reasons.

Firstly, the paper exaggerates James Mill's influence. To argue that he was the puppet master controlling the rest of the Philosophic Radicals is somewhat overstated - what of the very different view given in Halevy's *The Rise of Philosophic Radicalism*? To assert that he was somehow responsible for the 1832 Reform Act ignores the massive evidence that the Whigs had reasons of their own for passing the Act which would have influenced them even in the absence of a scare campaign. Mill was an important figure who has been unfairly neglected, primarily because he had a son much more famous than he was (I call this common phenomenon the Pepin the Short syndrome), but in the longer term his influence was marginal. Far more important, and closer to the picture of a scheming 'Leninist', was Edwin Chadwick who had a direct and lasting influence on the whole range of social policy.

This leads on to the second problem with the paper's thesis. Quite apart from such matters as the deliberate use of lies

for 'higher ends' Mill's ideas were strongly anti-libertarian in several respects and the consequences of his and the other Philosophic Radicals' influence were ultimately disastrous. Rothbard gives a fairly accurate account of Mill's views (though I would point out that his ideas of class divisions came from the Scottish Enlightenment and particularly from James Millar) but fails to spell them out in full. Essentially, Mill believed that the majority were neither morally nor intellectually fit for freedom. The middle class, however, were fit, but were excluded from power by an unjust system which worked for the benefit of a minority. However, if they were given power they would use it in an enlightened way because it was in their class interest to do so. Freedom was to be extended to the population in stages commencing with the middle classes, followed by the skilled working class and so on. The process of rendering these groups 'fit' was to be carried out by a new kind of state - the 'tutelary state' - which would be run by disinterested experts. These would be, well, people like James Mill actually! After an indeterminate period this state would no longer be necessary.

Now where have I heard something like that before? The comparison with Leninist ideas of the vanguard which Rothbard makes is both striking and apposite. I would argue that this whole notion is both contradictory and anti-libertarian. As Macauley pointed out in his famous review of Mill's *Essay on Government*, it assumes that the middle class would behave differently in power from any other class, in the face of massive historical evidence to the contrary. The whole idea of an elite giving people freedom or guiding them to it is dubious: if people are not inherently fit for freedom then how can they acquire that fitness under a state of tutelage? Many of the reforms advocated by the Philosophic Radicals were indeed put into effect but the result was to create a new kind of state, one with much greater capacity for growth than the *ancien regime* and much more capable of being identified with the general interest. Rothbard explicitly recognises this last point. The modern state, uniting democracy with nationalism and a welfare system which gives out 'goodies' to everyone is much harder to expose than the more obviously exploitative *ancien regime*.

The general tone of the paper is downbeat: Rothbard recognises that even his favoured strategy is flawed. The paper is offered as a starting point for discussion: let us take this offer up and see if there are not ways of coming to a more optimistic view. First of all a general comment. The strategies discussed by Murray Rothbard all share one feature; they are elitist. All of them assume that the great mass of people are too contaminated by statism, too prone to 'false consciousness' or simply too stupid to see that a libertarian society is in their interest. The withdrawal strategy reflects simple despair when confronted with this. The others are ways of trying to circumvent this apparent obstacle to the realisation of a libertarian order.

Now if the assumption is true then most libertarian arguments are called into question since they rest on the premise that people are the best judge of their own interest. However, I would argue very strongly that the assumption is false with respect to both the historical and the contemporary situation. There is ample evidence to show that the masses are more tolerant, more supportive of personal liberty and more sceptical of the state than the elites. (Against this one must set the strong influence of what may be

loosely called tribalism, which is why nationalism is easily the most dangerous rival to libertarianism and the main prop of the contemporary state.) For the last hundred and fifty years popular culture has been expressive of libertarian values in contrast to the elite culture which is profoundly hostile to liberty. If this be so then why do the majority not support a mass libertarian movement? For the same reason that they do not support mass radical movements of any kind: to support a radical change in the hope of a hypothetical benefit is risky and most people are, for very good reasons, risk-averse. A bird in the hand is always worth two in the bush. The more the state provides, the more this applies. Moreover, there are no visible alternatives to the state in several areas such as welfare, education and law and order. This makes a move away from the state even more chancy. Secondly there is the working of various forms of the 'prisoner's dilemma': while the general interest is served by greater liberty, the *particular* interests of individuals and groups are often best served by the expansion of the state. The other major problem is the ideology of nationalism, and, associated with that, the nature of the international system.

If the above is true then what are the consequences for strategy, and are there ones other than the four outlined by Murray Rothbard? I would submit that there are several.

First, one could conclude from the above that libertarians should adopt another Leninist dictum "Worse is better", and promote an apocalyptic breakdown of the *status quo* in the hope that this would provide the opportunity denied by the factors listed earlier. This should be strongly resisted. Quite apart from moral objections this would seem unlikely to succeed and potentially very dangerous if it did.

Secondly one could opt for violent revolution, carried out perhaps by a mass movement inspired and led by an internal libertarian vanguard. The best historical model for this is provided by the one successful anarcho-communist movement, the Spanish CNT/FAI where a large, broadly anarchist movement (the CNT) was controlled and led by an organisation of anarchist militants (the FAI). Apart from the issue of practicality, this is open to the same criticism as the vanguard thesis described by Rothbard, that means determine the ends which can be achieved and the means proposed are not compatible with libertarian values.

A third possibility is that of collective, as opposed to individual, withdrawal. This would mean libertarians collectively withdrawing from contact with statist society and instead creating their own separate and independent libertarian order. Historically this kind of thing has happened, though most previous examples involve not libertarians but religious groups. One surviving example are the Hutterite communities of Manitoba and North Dakota while the largest historical instance was the Jesuit state of Paraguay. This strategy is open to two objections of principle, that it writes off the mass of society, at least in the short term, and that a functioning libertarian social order would require a relatively large number of participants and amount of resources.

One strategy not mentioned by Rothbard, which I would support as the most likely to succeed, is that of the 'counter society'. Here libertarians do not withdraw from society but rather create, through private cooperation, alternatives to existing state dominated institutions until an entire alternative society exists alongside the 'official' one. This reduces

the problem, remarked on earlier, of the lack of perceived private alternatives to state provision. Ultimately the state may collapse of its own accord or may be removed by a La Boetie type outbreak of civil disobedience. This strategy has several practical advantages. It does not require ideological purity, charismatic leadership or complex and sophisticated organisation but rather the simple cooperation of people for mutual benefit. It will not require planning or purpose but should instead take the form of a spontaneous, unplanned process - a sort of Hayekian revolution! Clearly it can be combined with some or all of the other strategies. There is need for intellectual propaganda to change the climate of thought and discussion and to provide ideas which can be consumed/used by the emerging social order. There would be an important role for libertarian cadres and organisation and mass civil disobedience would be the most appropriate means for advancing/defending the counter society against assault. This strategy has both a firm basis in theory and provides guidance as to the appropriate individual and group action - it unites theory and praxis.

To return to the point made earlier, of the thesis put forward by nineteenth century libertarians of a historical evolution of commercial society towards a libertarian future. I find that argument very convincing, so why were the optimistic forecasts of the young Herbert Spencer and others not fulfilled? My own research suggests that up to the 1840s the *ancien regimes* in England was being eaten away by the emergence of such things as private currencies, private police forces and the non-state supply of a whole series of 'public goods'. (The ideological and organisational impetus for this came largely from Dissent, the organisation of Dissenting churches providing a practical example of voluntaristic social organisation.) In the crisis of the *ancien regime* between 1828 and 1849 the state was reformed in a way which checked this process. Thereafter the role of the state both local and national steadily expanded and this progressively squeezed out private alternatives. It is a commonplace to say that in communist states civil society is crippled or permeated by the state. The same process, however, has taken place in liberal democratic polities; it has simply not been carried anything like as far. The historic task before us is to reconstitute a complete civil society. In the highly unpropitious circumstances of communist Poland an enterprise of precisely this kind has been continuing for many years with ever greater success. The function of intellectuals in all of this would appear to be to provide a set of symbols and ideas which will motivate and unite a wider social movement: we should aspire to become organic intellectuals countering the hegemony of statism.

Three final points: historically there are two great examples of counter-society being used: the Christian church under the Roman Empire, and monasticism (particularly in its various Benedictine varieties) after the collapse of the Roman state and during the Middle Ages. Secondly, we must realise that our most dedicated opponents will often be the capitalists. All past experience suggests that the most effective enemies of capitalism and "the system of natural liberty" are established capitalists. Finally, the last sentence of the preceding paragraph suggests my own response to the 'Leninism' of James Mill. If we are to take lessons from Marxists, let us not be Leninists but rather Gramscians!

