

THE PHILOSOPHY OF LIBERTARIANISM

By Jarret B. Wollstein

Philosophers have long recognized that the greatest enemy man faces in his search for freedom and prosperity is himself. Having conquered most natural enemies in his environment, man faces extinction or enslavement from his own species. Nuclear war and ecological catastrophe are just two of the more obvious manifestations of the threat created by human irrationality and aggression. More subtle, but just as fundamentally sinister, are the violent and destructive passions of men which impel them to violent crime and authoritarian laws.

For centuries men of conscience have protested the injustices of their societies and sought a better world. All too often their ideals have remained unpursued dreams or been corrupted to create doctrines and institutions of human repression. But despite mistakes, progress has been made, and the search must go on if man is not to regress to the cave. It is the force of man's ideals which impel him forward and libertarianism is one of the most advanced and consistent of those ideals.

Life, Liberty & Property

Libertarianism is a modern philosophy of individual liberty. Libertarianism holds that if man is to prosper and be free, it is the enslavement of his fellows from which he must first be liberated.

The libertarian ideology asserts that every individual has an inalienable right to *his own* life, which he should be able to live as he sees fit, so long as he respects the same right of others. By extension, libertarianism holds that every individual has an inalienable right to the products of his actions, i.e., his justly acquired property, which is morally his to use and dispose of as he sees fit.

Libertarianism holds that man's rights to life, liberty and property are principles of proper social organization which should not be violated by any other individual or group. Thus libertarianism holds that any attempt to take any portion of an individual's services or property from him without his consent is a violation of his rights and a moral abomination, inherently destructive of any free and prosperous society—regardless of whether the aggressor is an individual, a criminal gang or a government.

Libertarians also insist that the same moral principles which apply to individuals apply to social groups as well—that acts which are immoral for private individuals acting on their own authority are equally immoral for social institutions acting with the support of the majority of their society.

Libertarianism supports the rights of individuals to engage in any form of human relationship or association which is peaceful and voluntary, including the free market, trade, voluntary communes, private enterprise and syndicalism. Conversely, libertarianism is opposed to anything that is violent and coercive—a regulated market, state socialism, militarism, the corporate state, theft and war.

Anti-Politics

Libertarianism is politically neither left nor right, liberal nor conservative. Like the political left, libertarians oppose the draft, censorship, war, the military/industrial complex, laws against recreational drugs and police repression. Like the political right, libertarians oppose taxation, anti-trust laws, wage/price controls, and so on. Libertarianism is explicitly *anti-political*.

Libertarian advocates of the free market point out that the present American political-economic system is far removed from their ideal of laissez faire capitalism. The free market means no government redistribution of wealth, no subsidies for industry, no minimum wage laws, no government maintained franchise monopolies, and no protection from foreign competition—evils all endemic in America today.

Similarly, libertarian syndicalists have little sympathy with Chinese and Soviet regimes with their tremendous centralization of power in the government. Libertarians seek a society in which individuals are free to run their own lives—not one in which men are ruled either by collusion between big corporations and the government or by edicts of ideologists acting in the name of "the people". It is clear that a libertarian society lies in the future.

The Libertarian Society

There are two main libertarian views of the nature of the society which should replace the present coercive ones: One group, the limited governmentists, hold with novelist-philosopher Ayn Rand that there should be a government whose sole function is the protection of individuals from aggressors. They argue that the best guarantee of justice would be through a state restricted to a police force, court system, and armed forces.

The second major group of libertarians, the anarcho-capitalists, reject government altogether. They argue that since every individual has the same right of action as any other individual, there can be no such thing as a social institution with the unique or final authority to deal with aggressors. They hold that a "limited government" cannot morally prevent other groups from offering the same defensive services. Thus, anarcho-capitalists maintain that social defense should be regarded as a service, and that in any given geographic area there may well exist competing agencies of defense.

With the exception of this difference, both limited-governmentalists and anarcho-capitalists are in complete agreement about the nature of a free society: In such a society, everything from education, to the minting of money, to road construction, to welfare would be voluntary enterprises. Libertarians consider taxation and any other form of involuntary financing immoral, inefficient, and unnecessary.

(Methods of organizing and financing "public services" without government are discussed in detail in a number of libertarian books, including *For A New Liberty*, *The Machinery of Freedom*, *Society Without Coercion*, and *Public Services Under Laissez Faire*.)

Is Libertarianism Practical?

The arguments against libertarianism are almost entirely "practical ones": How could you build roads without eminent domain? Wouldn't the poor and elderly starve without public welfare? How could you defend the country without a tax-supported military? And so on. Detailed and specific answers to all of these questions and many more appear in the many libertarian books and magazines, but one general answer is simply this:

Coercion gives men no special powers or abilities that they do not otherwise possess. All that which is truly worthwhile can be accomplished without aggression. Free men are not idiots or brutes—they do not need governments to force them to provide for their education, their sick, their poor, or for their old age. Historically the greatest advancements in human welfare have been made in precisely those periods with the least governmental regulation of human action.

The omnipotent state is the archaic remnant of tribal war lords and witch doctors; it is the super-parent who tells us that we are not fit to run our own lives. But there comes a time in the life of every man and society when they must leave the stifling safety of a programmed existence, discard the myths of childhood, and venture forth into the world of self-responsible adults. There are, to be sure, risks in abandoning the nursery, but no human development is possible without risk.

As libertarians we say to the world: Wake up and cut the cord. There is a world of infinite pleasure, variety and adventure open to the person with the courage to be free.

SIL DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLE

Adopted October 1969

As Advocates of Individual Liberty We Affirm:

That every person has an inalienable right to their own life, liberty and property;

That the only proper use of force is in retaliation against those who violate human rights;

That the basic violation of human rights consists of the initiation or the threat of the initiation of force against the individual;

That all proper social organization can only be a consequence of voluntary association between individuals;

That the only economic system consistent with human prosperity and happiness is laissez-faire capitalism;

That the ideologies and instrumentalities of coercive collectivism are the basic threat to human rights and the existence of moral human societies;

And that both moral individuals and moral societies have the obligation to act in their own rational self-interest to protect themselves from those who seek to coercively control, direct and enslave them.

With the apostles of coercion increasingly predominant in the councils of man, it is the duty of all those who value their life, liberty and property to take appropriate action—intellectual and social—to preserve and extend their freedom.

We as libertarians resolve to resist all forms of involuntary collectivism and all programs and activities of government which violate our rights and attempt to take from us the ability to set our own goals and to determine our own destiny.

We work for the day when all individuals are free, and we look forward to a society of peace, plenty and freedom where the individual's rights are truly politically inalienable. As advocates of reason and liberty we seek and will settle for no less than:

FREEDOM IN OUR TIME

If you find yourself in substantial agreement with these principles and you wish to work to promote awareness and acceptance of the philosophy of libertarianism, then you belong in the Society for Individual Liberty. Use the membership application in this brochure.



**SOCIETY FOR
INDIVIDUAL
LIBERTY**



**JOIN
TO BUILD
A FREE SOCIETY**

A DECADE OF ACHIEVEMENT

Since 1969, S.I.L. activities have been a vital part of the Libertarian movement. A review of these varied activities shows why S.I.L. has been described as a "cohesive link for libertarians".

CONFERENCES: More than one dozen regional conferences have been sponsored by S.I.L. since the first East Coast Conference in Philadelphia in 1969. All of the most highly regarded libertarian spokesmen have appeared at S.I.L. conferences: Murray Rothbard, Nathaniel Branden, John Hospers, Roy Childs, Karl Hess, Robert LeFevre, Tibor Machan, David Friedman. S.I.L. Conferences provided the first opportunities for many libertarians to meet and exchange ideas.

PROJECTS: The first project to achieve nationwide prominence for libertarianism was S.I.L.'s "Census Resistance '70" project. Major publicity resulted from the libertarians' spearheading of the fight for a voluntary census.

The S.I.L. originated "National Tax Protest Day" is now a fixture come April 15th with most libertarian clubs. Every year since 1973, the cry "Taxation is Theft" is brought home to more and more weary taxpayers.

S.I.L. also sponsored an "Anti-Draft Day" in 1973 when it appeared that the mechanism for having a draft would be left in place. In 1979, S.I.L. is in the forefront of libertarian groups working to stop any return to compulsory national servitude.

Building on a theme of "The American Revolution Betrayed", S.I.L. was the only libertarian organization to get deeply involved in an effort to explain the libertarian origins of the Revolution. S.I.L. sailed into Boston Harbor in 1973 at the 200th Anniversary of the Boston Tea Party and dumped "government" overboard. S.I.L. produced a film, "We Won't Get Fooled Again", documenting the betrayal of the Revolution. This film has been shown hundreds of times by libertarian groups.

LITERATURE SERVICES: S.I.L. originated the idea of inexpensive libertarian "issue papers" and, by the end of our first year, had distributed more than 175,000 copies. Today, there are more than 40 different subjects in the issue paper series and distribution has passed the million mark.

OTHER PROJECTS: S.I.L. has made books and magazines available at discount prices, produced the well-received "Bill of Rights—Void Where Prohibited By Law" poster, sponsored parties at conventions, conducted opinion surveys, built a Speakers Bureau, helped campus clubs get started with free literature, and presented a yearly "Phoenix Award" to ten prominent libertarian spokesmen.

BUILDING THE FREE SOCIETY

"The birth of S.I.L. marked the beginning of the modern libertarian movement. We are in the midst of an enormous advance of libertarian ideas and activities. In this existing ferment, S.I.L. has an increasing role to play, especially among young people and on college campuses."

Dr. Murray N. Rothbard

"I must commend you on what is, I believe, the longest and largest libertarian educational effort in world history: S.I.L., its publications and activities. I cut my teeth on S.I.L. position papers in college back in 1969."

Karl Bray

"I do hope the Society's work in favor of the cause of freedom will succeed in spite of all endeavors of the totalitarian parties."

Dr. Ludwig von Mises

"From my observation, since its inception in 1969, the Society for Individual Liberty has been an important factor in introducing and disseminating libertarian ideas. It has helped to provide a cohesive link for libertarians."

Robert LeFevre

The Society for Individual Liberty was the first national educational and activist organization dedicated to the principles of libertarianism. For more than ten years, S.I.L. has been promoting the goal of a free society in America through leadership, development of Libertarian clubs, dissemination of ideas, and encouragement of activist projects.

Your participation in S.I.L., through membership and through local activities, will help advance the future of the free society. Please show your support by joining S.I.L. today.



Don Ernsberger
Directors and Co-Founders



Dave Walter
Directors and Co-Founders

MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS AND CLUB INFORMATION

The Society for Individual Liberty has several classes of membership. In each case, the yearly dues provide the most substantial part of the S.I.L. budget. The size and diversity of S.I.L. projects and the amount of free and low cost support S.I.L. can offer to campus and community libertarian clubs, depends on the number of libertarians who join S.I.L. each year. Approximately half of the "Regular Membership" fee goes to the newsletter and the other half to projects.

REGULAR MEMBERSHIP—\$8.00 per year.

Includes 12 issues of *Individual Liberty*, the newsletter of S.I.L. *Individual Liberty* is a pioneer in presenting new and controversial issues of interest to libertarians such as "The Case Against Traditional Politics", "Abortion and Property Rights" and "The Case Against Rationing". In addition, *Individual Liberty* reports activities of the libertarian movement, interviews key personalities, and proposes strategy and tactics for the advancement of liberty—news and reports you can find nowhere else!

JOINT MEMBERSHIP—\$10.00 per year.

The same benefits as Regular Membership except two membership cards are included.

SUSTAINING MEMBERSHIP—\$15 per year & PATRON MEMBERSHIP—\$25 per year.

For those who desire to make an added contribution to the important work of S.I.L.

LIFETIME MEMBERSHIP—\$100.

Membership for life with all current and future benefits for those who want to make a major contribution now to S.I.L.'s work.

FREE INFORMATION on starting a libertarian club:

Please use the space on the application to indicate if you wish free information on starting a libertarian club in your community or on your campus. S.I.L. provides resources for more than 150 existing clubs—political, education, and activist. Why not affiliate your club with S.I.L.?

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Please enter my membership in the Society for Individual Liberty. I understand that my membership card will arrive with my first issue of *Individual Liberty*. My check or money order payable to S.I.L. is enclosed.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____
(please print)

School or occupation (optional) _____

Regular membership—\$8.00/yr.

Joint membership (2 persons at same address)—\$10.00/yr.

Sustaining membership—\$15/yr.

Patron membership—\$25/yr.

Lifetime membership—\$100.00.

Extra Contribution of \$_____ for S.I.L. Campus Projects fund.

Note: Due to higher postage costs, Canadians must add \$1.00 to their dues, and other foreign residents must add \$2.00.

FREE INFORMATION: Please send me information on starting a libertarian club.
 Send me information on affiliating my libertarian club with S.I.L.



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