

## The Puzzle of Our Age

When we view the earth from space, it appears to be wondrously beautiful and calm, doesn't it? It seems difficult to imagine the great suffering in much of the world below – the grinding poverty, the starvation, the savage repression, the endless wars.

Why does so much misery exist among human beings – highly-intelligent creatures living on an incredibly rich planet? How is it that in our daily lives, the vast majority of us manage to be productive and to co-exist harmoniously with our families, friends and neighbors; yet we find our society riddled with conflict and violence? What is the source of this conflict? How could things have gone so wrong?

## The Culprit Exposed

One source of trouble is common criminals. They are rightly and universally condemned. But most people don't realize that there is only one source of large-scale conflict and institutionalized violence – governments.

George Washington explained it two centuries ago: "Government is not reason, it is not eloquence, it is force. Like fire, it is a dangerous servant and a fearful master."

Governments emerged in the agricultural age to protect the property of farmers from bandits and foreign invaders. Rulers gained a license to organize armies for this purpose. When government leaders have been restricted to performing a protective function, commerce and civilization have flourished.

Unfortunately, this power has almost always been abused. The power to tax, backed up by armed soldiers and prisons, is the power to enslave. Rulers have invariably used their military power to enrich themselves and their cronies by looting the common people, and sadistically persecuting weak minorities.

These rulers have often cloaked their actions in collectivist doctrine, whether it was the old-time religious "divine right of kings" or the modern socialist "organic theory of society." They have bamboozled the people into sacrificing themselves for the so-called "common good."

Socialists believe that society is an organism, in which the people are like body cells with specific functions, to be commanded by its head – "the State." Socialists believe that "scientific" central planning of the economy will achieve their utopian goals of an egalitarian society.

But giving absolute power to a privileged few has *always* resulted in the concentration of wealth in the hands of a corrupt elite. All others are doomed to live in fear and poverty. And since dissenters – real or imagined – are a threat to "The Plan," they are savagely repressed. Indeed the grim legacy of centralized political power in the 20th Century has been one of slavery and mass murder by socialist dictators like Mao, Stalin, Hitler, and Pol Pot.

## Liberty Against Power

In contrast, liberty recognizes the dignity and primacy of the individual. A free society is based on mutual respect for the inalienable right of each individual to live as he or she pleases just so long as he or she does not harm others through force or fraud. The institutions of a free society are formed through voluntary association and are privately-funded. Government, if it is needed at all, is strictly limited to conflict resolution and the protection of life, liberty and property through police, courts and a citizen-based defense force. But even these agencies can be funded through user fees or voluntary contributions.

When liberty has blossomed, there has always been great economic and cultural progress, as people have been free to accumulate wealth and enjoy a better life. Tolerance and intellectual freedom have produced a flowering of the arts, philosophy, and science. Classical Greece, Republican Rome, the Saracen Empire, 11th-Century China, and the earlier United States enjoyed considerable degrees of freedom and progress.

However, the unbridled growth of government power destroyed liberty and prosperity in one after another of these earlier civilizations. And until about thirty years ago, it seemed that socialism would extinguish the liberty and progress we had inherited from the Renaissance, the Enlightenment and the American Revolution.

But the horrific legacy of socialism has inspired a new hunger for liberty around the world. A revived classical-liberal/libertarian movement has been ushering in the moral ideals of liberty and offering up practical solutions to repair the damage inflicted by authoritarian governments. These measures include abolishing taxes; privatization; scrapping economic controls; removing government barriers to free trade and migration; promoting private-property rights (including environmental protection), decentralization, recognizing and protecting the inalienable right to individual self-defense, and ending persecutions such as

drug prohibition and censorship.

Many of the leaders of this worldwide liberty movement are members of the International Society for Individual Liberty.

## Why ISIL?

**Our mission is explained well by the ISIL Statement of Principles:**

*"The International Society for Individual Liberty is an association of individuals and organizations dedicated to building a free and peaceful world, respect for individual rights and liberties, and an open and competitive economic system based on voluntary exchange and free trade. Members and affiliated organizations pursue these goals through independent action, using their freely-chosen strategies. The association exists to promote the exchange of information and ideas, to study diverse strategies, and to foster fellowship."*

This educational and networking effort began in the U.S. in 1969 when the original Society for Individual Liberty, the first grassroots libertarian organization, was formed in Pennsylvania by Jarret Wollstein, Dave Walter and Don Ernsberger. They started Tax Protest Day and Census Protests, published a series of 40+ issue papers, and organized many campus groups and conferences across the U.S. The pioneering SIL was the breeding ground for many future liberty organizations.

In 1980, the Libertarian International was founded by Canadian libertarian (and current ISIL president) Vincent Miller. He employed the SIL model in building the overseas liberty network, and in 1982 the first libertarian world conference was organized in Zürich, Switzerland.

The two organizations merged in 1989 to form the International Society for Individual Liberty, which was incorporated as a non-profit educational foundation.

ISIL operates as a non-partisan association, with members from all walks of life in just under 90 countries. Admirers have described ISIL as a "world freedom family."

ISIL's members are employing many strategies to promote liberty. Some teach in schools and universities, some write essays and books, some are journalists, some are computer networkers, others work through political campaigns, others work in single-issue coalitions. Some develop public-policy proposals, others influence popular culture.

## ISIL - Building A Free World

The International Society for Individual Liberty provides the following benefits in support of our members around the world:

**FREEDOM NETWORK NEWS:** ISIL's newsletter/magazine provides a forum for the exchange of ideas and information among our members. The *FNN* publishes profiles of successful activists and strategies, and features exclusive country reports from our Representatives. The *FNN* also provides ongoing coverage and analysis of decentralist trends, warnings of authoritarian legislation, advice on financial and personal privacy, and book reviews.

**OUTREACH PUBLICATIONS:** ISIL has sold over 4 million copies of our 30+ educational pamphlets on liberty and related issues in English and Spanish. They have been distributed by campus and community groups, and used as supplements to political campaigns and single-issue coalitions. They have been reproduced in newspapers and websites, broadcast by radio hosts, and have been used in court and legislative testimony. They are continually being translated and made public by our overseas members as well.

**OVERSEAS BOOK PUBLISHING:** A vital part of spreading the ideas of liberty is to make available literature in the local language. ISIL has sponsored or facilitated the publishing and distribution of thousands of introductory libertarian books in former communist countries, including the works of Ayn Rand in her native Russia.

**WORLD CONFERENCES:** ISIL has held acclaimed annual international conferences since 1982 in Europe, North and Central America and Africa. Speakers have included such luminaries as Nobel laureate Milton Friedman, and many other top economists, philosophers, members of parliament, legislators, and other freedom activists. The open climate for debate and intellectual exchange of the attendees at these events has made ISIL conferences a catalyst for the development of a pan-European liberty movement and many of the overseas publishing projects. Business networks, lifelong friendships, and even marriages have resulted from ISIL conferences!

**WEBSITE:** Many ISIL members are at the forefront of the computer revolution - one of the world's great hopes for liberty. ISIL's website is packed with on-line books, a constitutional refer-

ence library, our pamphlet series, recent newsletters, conference updates, and news bulletins. The web address is <http://www.isil.org>

**PEACE INITIATIVES:** ISIL and our members are promoting decentralist peace plans in trouble spots like the Middle East and Balkan States. Many of our proposals have been built upon the pathbreaking work of ISIL Advisory Board members Frances Kendall and Leon Louw, who have been nominated three times for the Nobel Peace Prize for their involvement in dismantling apartheid and promoting a Swiss-style decentralist plan to defuse racial conflict in South Africa.

### Join ISIL's World Freedom Family

ISIL's worldwide pro-liberty work is funded almost entirely by memberships and donations from individuals like you. Progress is being made, but there is still so much work to do! With your help, we can all enjoy a free, peaceful, and prosperous world.

A basic ISIL membership is just \$35 per year. As an ISIL member, we will send you:

- ✓ A subscription to the *Freedom Network News*, with international news, ISIL world conference updates, activist profiles, legislative warnings, privacy advice and more!
- ✓ A full set of 30+ ISIL pamphlets, plus copies of new titles as they are published.
- ✓ An ISIL membership card welcoming you to "the world freedom family."
- ✓ Tax deductions on contributions in the USA. (The International Society for Individual Liberty, Inc. is recognized as a non-profit educational foundation under section 501(c)3 of the IRS Code.)

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*Join ISIL in building a better, freer world.*



**Free At Last!**