

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.

CENSORSHIP IS ON THE MARCH

DAVID WALTER



SOCIETY FOR INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY

CENSORSHIP IS ON THE MARCH

It is becoming increasingly hazardous to speak out on controversial subjects. Our free speech is being eroded bit by bit, often in reaction to events. And most of us, though we believe in free speech, have been watching it happen in silence. The repression has come from the young and from the old; from the Left and from the Right; from private individuals or groups and from government; from people who are so sure they are right that they will tolerate no disagreement. KYW (Phila.) edit.

The Constitution of the United States recognizes the freedom of speech and press and, presumably, one's right to view, listen, or purchase spoken or printed matter. Alexander Hamilton, writing in the *Federalist Papers* (No. 84), felt that such a provision could be rendered meaningless by public opinion that favored repression or censorship. Apparently his worst fears have been realized for, at every hand in every community, censorship is on the march!

- In the Philadelphia suburbs an adult Bookstore is harassed by police, ministers and political pressure. Pressure is also brought to bear to close down a popular teen disco for allegedly "corrupting the youth".

- In Washington, D.C., witnesses at hearings find that cartoons on TV represent a threat to the moral climate of the nation. The government also bans all TV advertising of cigarettes.

- A Midwestern town burns copies of "pornographic" books in the town square while townspeople sing "Onward Christian Soldiers".

- Southern blacks demand that some of Mark Twain's books be removed from libraries because of references to "niggers".

- Leftist hoodlums invade an Eastern TV studio and destroy property in protest against a network documentary on the Black Panthers.

- A mysterious fire which destroys a California cult church is applauded by the leader of a local "right wing nut" organization.

- An anti-tax activist is thrown in jail for continuing to speak out against the practices of the I.R.S.

- Larry Flynt, a raunchy magazine publisher, is dragged into numerous courts to answer charges of distributing obscene materials. At one such trial, he is gunned down and paralyzed for life.

- Striking farm workers in California assault a speaker for the growers' association yet demand extra police protection for their own rallies.

Can anyone reading this not call to mind an instance where the local guardians of morality, religion, racial pride, patriotism, or "the truth" have not attempted to repress those who dare express contrary or unpleasant views?

Censorship is used by those who can not or will not form counter-arguments, use reason, or take the time and expend the effort necessary to change people's minds. It is so much easier to use force (as if a mind could be really change, or a true idea made false by the use of force) to prevent contrary views. Where private property is not infringed by laws, regulations, or seizures, censorship is impossible.

Because man has a right to his life and to the property he has earned which sustains it, no one who respects private property would attempt censorship. By seizing a printing press, or forcing free "equal time" on radio and TV station owners, or closing down a night club, one is negating the right to property and one's own right to hold the same.

Not only is the self-appointed censor (or the "democratically elected" censor) destroying the property base upon which a free society depends, but he is also undermining the intellectual base. How can civilization, in the broad sense, progress if the creators of new ideas, inventors, innovators—the doers—are continually in fear of repression and imprisonment? Censorship represses new ideas; whether these new ideas are good or bad is irrelevant for it is impossible to permit the censorship of one without also permitting the censorship of the other.

Copies of this brochure are available for 25 for \$1 from: Society for Individual Liberty, PO Box 1147, Warminster, PA.

Now, obviously, we all think that there are many things in this world that would be better off unknown, unmentioned or unread. To the extent that we permit freedom for new ideas we must expect that some people will dispense ideas or goods that we consider "bad". But people have a right to be wrong so long as they do not use force against others.

Selling a salacious book to a willing buyer can not be prohibited if one accepts the principle of individual rights and non-coercion. However, those who accept coercion—forcing other people to conform to their will—will see it quite differently.

Confronted by ideas or activities he finds objectionable but not violations of individual rights, the non-coercionist would first avoid dealing with the perpetrators, and, if he felt strongly enough about the activity, try to persuade others to do likewise. For example, a bookstore which dealt in erotica might be boycotted by people who disliked erotica. They might distribute leaflets describing the alleged harm of erotica to local high school students. But there would be no police raids, no book burnings or jail terms so long as the book merchant did not forcibly drag in customers off the street and compel them to read his literature.

Censorship by government or with the tacit approval of government, is always the predecessor of totalitarianism. Wherever the collectivists and self-appointed guardians of "the public morality" have the legal power to censor ideas and their expression, it becomes increasingly difficult to express new ideas, speak freely and protest social injustice. If America is to avoid further descent into the abyss of totalitarianism, censorship and the repression of ideas must be rejected. Instead, the right of the individual to freedom of speech and expression must be upheld universally and unconditionally. Thomas Jefferson felt so strongly about free speech that he stated that he would rather see newspapers in existence and government absent than governments without newspapers.

The fact that you are reading this leaflet is proof that it is not too late. If you now advocate censorship, consider the precedent your position sets for all freedom of expression, including your own. Once the precedent is established that it is socially permissible to prohibit the expression of some ideas which are unpopular or "offensive" (such as sexual ideas), it is a short step to the repression of *all* ideas considered unpopular.

Censorship is a violation of the rights of its victims and a threat to the freedom of us all. It must be rejected by every American.