

In Pursuit of Liberty

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AN EXAMINATION of any classified directory will reveal the existence of hundreds of associations, unions, etc., promoting a diversity of views, aims and activities. Among them are to be found such durable political animals as the Socialist Party of Great Britain, the Communist Party, the National Front, etc., who occupy the fringe of political life. Also there are such pressure groups as the Bow Group, the Monday Club, New Orbits, the Fabian Society, each of whom press their own particular view as to the direction of the party (to which they are affiliated) should go.

It was a pleasure to be asked to review the manifesto* of a body calling themselves—rather prosaically—Common Wealth and who deservedly define their objectives as libertarian. Any group of people who describe their aspirations in the following terms merit being taken seriously, and should command both our sympathy and encouragement:

“The libertarian society . . . will be rooted in co-operation and not in coercion, hence it will be classless, making men equal in the right to status and regard. Its social forms will be constantly changing, never static, always moving in the direction of providing a free environment for the maximum development of the individual human personality. We do not attempt to draw a blueprint of libertarian society, for the form it will take will be decided only by itself in the course of the struggle for its realisation. The authoritarian loves to draw blueprints, to seek authority to implement them and to end by imposing them. How can we, distracted by the pressure of today, be certain of what is good for the future human being? He alone can

decide that. In political terms, coercion may never be completely eliminated but the struggle against it will be a continuous process. This will always be true; the final perfect human being will never be born nor, in consequence, will the final human society. Human society is subject to evolution, and the concomitant of perfection in evolution is extinction. For us to assume a state of eventual perfection and to attempt to lay down rules for it, would be not only foolhardy but arrogant.”

While the manifesto enunciates for the most part sound principles and worthy objectives, Common Wealth has yet to show from its statements on the pursuit of liberty

and human rights that it understands the full meaning and implications of economic liberty, without which men will remain victims of entrenched legalised privilege and the arbitrary actions of government.

For my money John Stuart Mill's essay *On Liberty* still remains the finest testament on the real meaning as to what freedom is all about, of which the following excerpt is an example. “The sole end for which mankind are warranted (individually or collectively) in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number is self protection.”

Above all else, as Mill pointed out, there will be “No great improvement in the lot of mankind . . . until a great change takes place in the fundamental constitution of their modes of thought.”

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