

Liberty and Authority

By J. PALUZIE-BORRELL



IF LIBERTY means the gratifying of our whims, and authority the prohibiting and constraining of them, then liberty and authority must be mortal enemies. Apart from the short, first periods of civilisation, which bequeathed us neither ruins nor heroes, victories nor revolutions, history is a record of struggle between liberty and authority. Stories may differ in their form, but their essence is the same, because social relations can be of only two kinds; on the one hand, the subjection of the majority of men for the benefit of the few, and on the other hand, free and equal co-operation among all men in the utilisation of the gifts of nature. When the unequal distribution of wealth and power corrupts and disintegrates society, the natural association among men which is indispensable to production must be imposed upon them from outside, upon their bodies through coercion and their souls through deceit. In this way progress stops, and civilisation degenerates. Finally, it either petrifies, as in China and Egypt, or is destroyed, as in Greece and Rome, by stronger people who have enjoyed more freedom. Thus have all civilisations prior to ours whose material progress has not immunised them against moral decay inevitably perished.

Certain pursuits of man neither produce wealth nor render services which are desired in themselves; their object is to relieve human ills. Such are medicine, the law, welfare services and the police, which try to overcome illness and discord on the one hand, and poverty and crime on the other. Such pursuits do not deal with the normal functions of man in society but with the abnormal, and instead of men recognising this and acting accordingly, the abnormal is accepted, and the effects of social maladjustments are treated as though they were the causes of them.

As the general malaise seems to make authoritarian intervention in man's life more necessary every day, people believe in intervention as in a powerful magic. And because in a sick society not even the strong could survive without help, that magic intrudes into the whole social fabric and appears indispensable. Its wizards enforce their false authority and corrupt the true authority of liberty.

The magic fails and must always fail. This is borne out by the variety of the methods adopted, which vary at different times and in different countries. Like the

advertisers of detergents, each minister for propaganda proclaims *urbi et orbi* that the policy of his nation is the best, so that all policies are now the best. And when next day everyone changes his course, each proclaims again that his own new one is the best. In this way, while material progress still goes on, the states do not advance a single step in their professed task of improving the conditions of the people. The resulting uneasiness ultimately culminates in revolution, which overthrows the false authority. Afterwards, the new leaders, being unable or unwilling to establish true liberty, enforce a new form of false authority, and in this way the circle begins again.

The transitions and differences between these alternating periods are soft or rough according to how the political capacity of the people has been cultivated. Anyhow, such state-managed reforms deserve the peasant's criticism of the new bus line which was substituted for the ancient stage-coach service: — "I cannot see the great advance. In fact, a bus jolts you at the same holes as a stage-coach, only it jolts you more frequently! What must be bettered is the road!"

To smooth the path of society, instead of enslaving others through coercion and deceit, men must harmonize economic laws with justice. But if the ruler's authority and the people's liberty are inimical, how can their collaboration be obtained?

Liberty is born with man. By joining one's thumb and forefinger in the shape of a circle, one can loosely enclose the slender wrist of a baby a few days old; after insistently trying to encircle a broader part of his arm, so as to restrict movement, the baby bursts out crying. His reaction suggests that liberty is a natural instinct in man.

It is true that education appears to overcome instincts, but instead of overcoming them, it redirects them, because in man's nature education is but the superstructure, and instincts are the very foundation. To destroy them you must destroy man but corrupt them and you can condition him even to the unnatural act of slaughtering his fellow men. Normally, a nation is not an army of soldiers commanded by captains, but a free association of individuals governed by the laws of their own nature. Therefore liberty is indispensable to a natural life.

However, unbounded liberty, properly termed license, tempts men to subdue and despoil others, and in this way

struggle destroys free association. To keep men united in collaboration it is necessary that justice exist between them. To establish and support justice is not a task for each individual but for society as a whole, but by virtue of the division of labour, as in other parts of the social and economic body, this task is delegated to the government. No matter if authority is exerted by some specialised men or by the whole society, justice involves authority. Therefore authority is indispensable.

Without authority, liberty can turn to abuse. Without liberty, authority becomes tyranny. Both liberty and authority are equally necessary, hence they must co-exist in harmony. Now, in order to see if this harmony is possible, let us examine them both more closely.

Man's life is like the descent of a toboggan along a snow track; as the natural laws of our being convey us from birth to death, so gravity pulls the toboggan towards its goal. The rider may drive skilfully along the middle of the track, or zig-zag recklessly at the risk of breaking his neck. His fate depends upon himself, but generally everyone learns how to drive his own toboggan. However, if ignorant or evil-minded persons put a log across the track, the rider will face the dilemma of either dashing against it or turning from the track and careering into the onlookers. In this analogy, liberty would be the absence of the log: liberty means the absence of artificial obstacles, leaving man free to harmonize his interests in accordance with the natural law. And, as each man has his own interests, every intrusion upon the interests of others infringes upon their liberty. In other words, the concept of liberty, like that of justice, is meaningless unless it embodies the idea that it be common and equal to all men.

Once upon a time, a good king, who had lost his way, came to a river, and seeing a boat, asked the boatman to take him across.

The boatman answered: "It's twopence worth!"

The king promised to pay and on getting into the boat the boatman repeated "It's twopence worth!"

After receiving the twopence, the boatman began to row, and as the boat rocked too much, he shouted to the king: "Don't stir! Be quiet!" The sovereign obeyed.

When they came to the opposite bank and the boatman had helped the king to land, he said: "I am always most faithfully at your Majesty's service."

The king exclaimed with surprise: "Did you recognise me?"

"Yes, Sire," said the other. "I have acclaimed you on many occasions."

"Why then," insisted the king, "did you speak to me as to an inferior?"

"Because," replied the boatman, "in the boat I am the king."

"Do you not know," retorted the king, "that I could have killed you for your discourtesy?"

"I know it, Sire," said the boatman, calmly, "but as you cannot row, you would have had to remain on the other bank."

Then the good king smiled and shook hands with the boatman because the king accepted the boatman's authority on boating.

In a similar manner, the most powerful man in the world, when he is ill, obeys his physician's orders, because he recognises the physician's greater knowledge in medicine.

True authority then, is superiority in knowledge: as Bacon said, knowledge is power.

Now, if true liberty is the absence of artificial obstacles against the operation of the natural law, and true authority is superiority in knowledge, the opposition between liberty and authority disappears and is replaced by collaboration between them. True authority is that which sees the log, shows it to the man on the toboggan, and helps remove it. True liberty is the descent of the toboggan along the free track.

At his birth, man is deprived of the resources which allow him to live in liberty. The baby must be nursed, clothed, fed and washed. He is in no manner free. To make him fit for life, his parents exert, or ought to exert, true authority on him, by showing him the obstacles in life and how to overcome them, and gradually letting him face them, according to his capability of surmounting them. In the same manner, the task of true authority is to maintain and raise the standard of intellect and morals, in order that true liberty be achieved. The higher the intellectual and moral standard of a nation, the greater will be its true liberty.

As ignorance does not engender wisdom, the social and moral backwardness of nations deprives them of both true authority and true liberty.

As we cannot hope that the false authority which springs from the backwardness of nations will educate men in the meaning of liberty, it is our mission to devote ourselves to this task. No matter how presumptuous this belief may appear to those who do not know our philosophy, we must continue in our efforts. This great responsibility imposes upon us the duty of improving both our knowledge and our methods, making use of the present incomplete liberty to set the foundation of the great future liberty.

FIAT MONEY INFLATION IN FRANCE

By Andrew Dickson White. Crystal-clear, devoid of sophistry, this painstaking account by an eminent historian and statesman (1832-1912) of the cause and mechanics of monetary inflation in revolutionary France and of the material and moral havoc it wrought, is invaluable to the student of the prevailing inflation in the Western World. 4s.