

# In Pursuit of Liberty

*by Jarret B. Wollstein*

We are living in exciting times. From the Soviet Union, to Cuba, to East Germany, totalitarian socialism is crumbling and human liberty is advancing throughout the world. With little more than their bare hands and raw courage, ordinary people on every continent are defeating the tanks and secret police of tyrants. We are eyewitnesses to the realization of Victor Hugo's famous maxim, "*An invasion of armies can be resisted, but not an idea whose time has come.*"

## **Without Liberty, No Other Human Values Are Possible**

Liberty is the freedom to act as you please so long as you don't coerce others. Liberty means you can associate with others voluntarily, you can speak and publish freely, you can practice the religion of your choice (or none at all), keep what you earn, run your own business, and love and live as you please (so long as you don't violate the rights of others).

We need liberty to think, to create, and to fulfill our individual and unique potential. Liberty is as much a requirement of our psychological nature as food and air are requirements of our biological nature. When liberty is denied, economies stagnate, cultures deteriorate, science declines, living standards fall, and the human spirit languishes. Liberty is essential for any decent and humane society.

Liberty is such a compelling and important value that even brutal dictatorships claim to support it. Tyrants say they are promoting "higher" freedoms – such as "national security", "economic equality", or "the common good." The graveyards of history are filled with the corpses of those deceived by such claims.

The Soviet Union, Communist China, Nazi Germany and other totalitarian nations, murdered and tortured over 100 million people in the name of "economic equality" and "the common good". Even the United States imprisoned over 115,000 Americans of Japanese descent during World War II in the name of "national security."

As Benjamin Franklin observed in 1759, those who give up their liberty in exchange for government promises of security, end up with neither liberty nor security.

Countries which deny liberty to their citizens are the most brutal, poor, and miserable places on earth. In the end, tyrannies fail because they are based upon coercion, and coercion is fundamentally incompatible with human nature.

## **Coercion vs. Voluntary Association**

We need others for most of what we want out of life: companionship, friendship, family, recreation, and wealth. A hermit living alone on a desert island may be able to survive, but his living standard and lifestyle will be little better than that of an animal.

There are only two basic ways of getting what you want from others: voluntarily or coercively. When you deal with others voluntarily, others deal with you because they want to, because they receive some benefit – material or psychological – by dealing with you. The tools of voluntarism are friendship, trade, compassion, and love. In coercive association, you get what you want from others by deception or fear. The tools of coercion are intimidation, threats, fraud, and physical violence. Voluntary association promotes trust and respect, and provides benefits for everyone. Coercive association creates fear and distrust, and victimizes some at the expense of others. A guiding principle of any free society is voluntary association. Individual Rights are Essential for a Free Society.

**Individual rights is the recognition by others that voluntary association is fundamental and you should be free to live your life in peace. Your rights include:**

- freedom of speech, press, religion and assembly
- freedom of association
- the right to defend yourself (including the right to own the means of self-defense, such as guns)
- the right to keep what you earn
- freedom of enterprise and the right to own property.

The right to property – the freedom to acquire, control, use and dispose of material possessions – is essential. Without property rights, no other rights are possible. Without the right to publish and read magazines and newspaper papers, you have no freedom of and little freedom of speech. Without the right to own religious books and support houses of worship, you have no freedom of religion. Without the right to earn a living and keep what you earn, there is no right to life. Without the right to own and use weapons, you can't defend your life, home or family.

### **Freedom Is Practical As Well As Moral**

Socialists often argue that liberty won't feed a starving man – implying that liberty is less important than government-guaranteed security. But it is the absence of liberty that produces starvation and poverty. The freer a country, the more prosperous it is. The poorest, most miserable countries in the world – Cuba, North Korea, Iran, Iraq, etc. – have an abundance only of government promises, fear, and suffering.

### **Coercion Is the Principal Impediment to Human Happiness And Prosperity**

The basic way you lose your liberty is when others coerce you; when others use force or the threat of force to compel you to surrender your property or labor, or prevent you from living as you please.

Not only does an aggressor harm you, he or she also frays the fabric of peaceful society by causing others to live in fear. When coercion becomes common, entire cities can become terrorized or destroyed. Just walk through downtown Los Angeles or Detroit after dark – if you dare.

Most of us reject and denounce coercion when it is committed by individuals. Thieves, swindlers, murderers, rapists, and thugs are generally scorned. Unfortunately there is a form of group coercion which is not always recognized as bad:

### **Coercive Government**

A government is an association of men and women authorized by society to use force to compel obedience. The proper role of government is to protect your freedom and safety, from both domestic and foreign aggressors.

But as George Washington observed over 200 years ago, "Government is like fire. A dangerous servant and a fearful master." When government agents cross the line from defenders of your rights to violators, they become just another criminal gang.

Morally and legally, government agents are bound to protect our rights. When they don't – when police or federal agents rob, assault or kill innocent people, even if it's "by mistake" or for "good reasons" – they MUST be arrested and tried, like any other criminals – to preserve justice and the rule of law.

### **How Coercive Is Your Government**

One index of how coercive government is, is how much of your income it takes in taxes. If the government takes half your income, you are working half your time for the state. If government takes 75%, you are 75% enslaved.

As recently as 1956, the average US citizen paid less than 10% of their income in taxes. In 1956, a single working parent could support a spouse and earn enough in 10 years to buy a new house. Today the government takes at least 50% of the average person's income. Many people are working 2 or even 3 jobs, and even with both spouses working, fewer and fewer families can afford to own a house.

Increasingly, police and federal agents in many western countries are acting like storm troopers. In the United States, anything you own can now be seized without trial under asset forfeiture laws. Over 5,000 people a week now lose their property, and according to the *Pittsburgh Press*, in 80% of the cases they are not even charged with a crime. In Britain under the Official Secrets Act, police can break into private homes without search warrants and detain alleged dissidents for years without trial. In Australia, police have begun door-to-door gun confiscation raids. In Israel, the army bulldozes the homes of the relatives of alleged Palestinian sympathizers.

The Evil Empire is gone. But Big Brother is here. However, his days are numbered.

### **The End Of The Nation-State?**

The growing authoritarianism of governments in the West, will eventually lead to their collapse, just as it led to the collapse of the Soviet Empire. Because of the rapid growth of privacy-enhancing technology, this collapse will probably come sooner rather than later.

As James Dale Davidson and Lord William Rees-Mogg explain in their prophetic book, *The Sovereign Individual*, "The process by which the nation-state grew over the past five centuries will be put into reverse by the new logic of the Information Age."

That process includes:

The spread of inexpensive, encryption technology, making possible, in theory, an unprecedented level of personal and financial privacy, and even widespread immunity from taxation.

Digital cash and the emergence of the "cyber-economy" through the Internet – "a region where government will have no more dominion than they exercise over the . . . outer planets."

### **Discrediting Of Centralized Governments**

Governments throughout the world are offering ever-poorer services at ever-higher prices. As a result they are losing credibility. On May 5, 1997, "NBC Nightly News" reported that Mexican police have become so corrupt that most Mexicans no longer call police to catch thieves and murderers, but punish offenders themselves. In Italy, half of the entire economy is underground and untaxed. Similar disillusionment with government may be found throughout the world.

### **A Global Free Economy**

From the concentration camps of Nazi Germany and the Soviet gulags, to Cambodia's killing fields, the 20th Century has witnessed hideous despotisms. But coercive government of every variety – socialism, fascism, and the democratic welfare state – simply doesn't work and eventually collapses.

Liberty is the wave of the future. The Internet, computer encryption, digital cash and other exciting new technologies have begun to free people throughout the world. With courage and dedication, the 21st Century will be the century of global liberty. Sooner or later liberty will triumph. Liberty is our destiny – an idea whose time has come.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Jarret B. Wollstein** is a member of ISIL's Board of Directors and a founder of the original Society for Individual Liberty.