

## *May 68: Liberty or its Illusion?*

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I observed the events of May 1968 from my council estate in Rochdale. They seemed to have no relevance to me, to my father, to his friends, indeed, to the town as a whole. We saw on our TV screens self-indulgent children of the bourgeoisie calling for the overthrow of the system. A system which had brought a modicum of prosperity and security to a population where memories of both the grim inter-war years and the pride and sacrifice of the war itself were all too vivid.

These feelings of bewilderment were enhanced when I arrived at Cambridge later that year. Public schoolboys, with glittering careers awaiting in finance, the media, the law, occupied buildings and pontificated about revolution. Their collective knowledge of the actually existing working class was, transparently, rather less than it was of, say, the Visigoths.

It was hard to treat it seriously, as anything other than some live street version of Footlights. These people were surely not for real.

I was completely wrong. The passage of the 1968 generation through the general body politic has had devastating, adverse consequences not just for the white working class but for society as a whole.

Not that I am invoking a mythical Golden Age. Things needed to change, that was why we supported Labour. Class divisions were wide, complacency was rife, patriarchy and sexism were deeply embedded. But things were gradually changing for the better, both economically and socially, under the banner of the social democratic compromise which all political parties had embraced. The fantasy that the workers would arise and overthrow capitalism had long ago been not just kicked but positively booted into touch.

The distinguishing feature of the 68ers has continued to be their immense capacity for self-absorption and self-indulgence, regardless of the consequences for others less fortunate than themselves. This, combined with the bogus social 'science' which was stuffed into their heads, has led to the cultural and political immiserisation of large sections of society.

A true 68er has a deep, unquenchable need to be seen by his or her peers as, to use the phrase of the time, 'right-on'. Liberal beliefs (in the American sense of the word) must not only be held by any right-thinking individual, they must be displayed conspicuously.

The idea that any other opinions might be held is anathema. So, when the editor of this very magazine broke with liberal ideology a few years ago and began to question the concept of multi-culturalism, he was met with hysterical abuse.

This mind set has led 68ers to adopt beliefs which do not survive any reasonable degree of empirical scrutiny. So, for example, it has become axiomatic in such circles that 'prison does not work'. Almost to a man and woman, they are entirely unaware of the detailed, scientific, statistical work which shows that it *does* work. The effect takes place not so much through its effect on people already in prison, but by deterring others from carrying out crimes they might otherwise have committed.

The idea that the lower orders are capable of a response such as this, which involves a degree of foresight and calculation, is beyond the grasp of most 68ers. The fact that even the most stupid driver routinely slows on approaching a speed camera is simple, strong evidence in favour of this view of behaviour. But, no, the guidance of the enlightened elect is always needed for those incapable of thinking for themselves.

The point on crime is far from being a mere academic one. Most crime is carried out by poor people on poor people in their local neighbourhood. Crime has a devastating effect on the quality of life, a fact recognised partially by politicians over the past 15 years. Yet liberal outrage still greets the idea of building more prisons.

The concept of a high culture, experience of which enhances the quality of a person's life, went without saying for generations of organised labour and its political representatives. The Labour giants Ernest Bevin and Aneurin Bevan were at daggers drawn on most things, but they agreed on this. The generation which won the Second World War were aware of Shakespeare and Beethoven. They knew of the existence of a high culture, and aspired that progress would allow their own children to access it as readily as the bourgeoisie.

The systematic denigration of Western culture by the 68ers has impoverished the lives of millions.

So, too, with history. History is of course capable of many interpretations, though a belief that they are in some sense all valid means the discipline descends into mere storytelling. Attractive though the post-modern perspective is to 68ers in some settings, it is certainly not the case with history, where a semi-literate Marxism denigrating Britain's past is the received wisdom. No country's history is perfect, but we can be proud of our progressive legacy, from defeating Continental dictators to abolishing slavery. Children with no real sense of their own history are deprived of their inheritance as citizens.

Post-modernism is most definitely to the fore in the views of 68ers on questions of family structure and multi-culturalism. The proposition that the conventional nuclear family is on average the best structure in which to bring up children has one of the firmest empirical backings in the whole of social science. Yet this has been blithely ignored, in the true anti-scientific spirit of 1968! The result has been the virtual destruction of the conventional family amongst the poor, with resulting increases in their social and economic degradation.

Multi-culturalism is in partial retreat, though the spirit of 68 is hard to eradicate. During the past decade, Britain has experienced what is possibly the greatest movement of population in Western Europe since the *Völkerwanderungen* which followed the collapse of the Roman Empire. Yet we are seriously invited to believe that this has no adverse effects on our sense of well-being and social cohesion. Again, it is the poor which bear the brunt of the dislocations this policy creates.

Those scions of the middle class who took to the streets in 1968 sought to make common cause with the downtrodden, the oppressed. Yet the impact of their self-indulgent posturings has been to reduce social mobility and to trap people in lives devoid of cultural nourishment. The Law of Unintended Consequences could have been devised with the 68ers in mind.

Their outpourings have potentially even more sinister consequences for liberty. So convinced are they of their virtue and righteousness that they are willing to use the powers of the state to suppress perceived thought crimes.

So if as a member of an ethnic minority – the Welsh for example – you disagree with what someone is saying, you can call in the police to shut them up. If as a journalist you attempt to visit Aboriginal areas of Australia to investigate widespread alcoholism and paedophilia, you will be arrested for failing to have the required permit. And, far from supporting you, your fellow members of the NUJ will demand you undergo ‘cultural sensitivity’ training. Thus does social democracy slide effortlessly into social fascism, the ultimate legacy of the 68ers.

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