

Poverty – one of Britain's traditions

ALTHOUGH the British people may claim to have been the pioneers of parliamentary government Malcolm Hill suggests that Britain is patently not a democracy. He gives a detailed account of the gaining of civil freedoms during the long struggle with the monarchy, the development and limitations of Parliament and the growth of our legal system with the many rights now protected by law.

However he argues that sovereignty is shared briefly at certain moments by the monarch, often by the Prime Minister and Government, sometimes by the media, occasionally by sportsman or popular heroes but seldom by the people who have their one moment of choice at a General Election. "Sovereignty in Britain," he says, "is splintered between many and people suffer – as a consequence there is ineffective government."

The first half of this book is devoted to the story of the fight for civil liberties, the fight against slavery and arbitrary arrest and the fight for free speech, fair trial, and so on. The second half of the book tackles the area where Malcolm Hill believes our fundamental failure to be a real democracy lies, namely our lack of economic liberties. As he says, "the abolition of civil slavery did not mean the dawn of liberty ... Just as a bird needs two wings in order to fly freely in the sky, so an individual needs both civil and economic freedom before he can realise the liberty which is a birthright bequeathed by Nature".

Geoffrey Lee

SLAVERY IN A LAND OF LIBERTY

Malcolm Hill
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One of his main criticisms is of the gradual erosion of the principle of free trade which from the 1920s has led Britain into a system of state control and protectionism. The European Union, he claims, has protectionism in "its foundation, in its intent, in its operation and in its want of vision."

Malcolm Hill's other main criticism, and its most important one, is of the existence of mass poverty. We live with the politics of mitigation of poverty with no attempt to find its causes and eradicate them. "Britain", says the author, "has endured mass poverty for six centuries, without break. Indeed it may be said that one of the longest traditions in British history is poverty, which prevents an able-bodied individuals earning a livelihood sufficient to support themselves and family throughout their lives or live an independent life."

He agrees that poverty is disguised by the ownership of cars, computers and colour tele-

visions and, of course, it is not to be equated with the starvation associated with third-world poverty. But nevertheless it has to be mitigated by the welfare state which has to fund education, health, housing, pensions and social security which if individuals received their full wages could be paid for by themselves. The causes, Malcolm Hill argues, go back to the first land enclosures in the 13th-century and the gradual separation of man from their common ownership of land. The solution, he believes, would be to "convert the

value of land into public property by taxing it on its annual rental value: it should be collected as public revenue."

The concomitant of this would be to lift taxes off incomes and production so that everyone received their full wage and could support themselves and their families. "When the British eradicate wage slavery, they will ask themselves why it took so long to achieve what Nature

intended for them at the dawn of human existence."

Why indeed? This important book will provide an historical and practical tool for any politician with the will to try and lift the burden and give Britain its economic freedom.

