

Chapter 1: On Rights

Dear Political Economic Digest Series participant,

Welcome to the first chapter of Political Economic Digest Series. In this chapter we'll be discussing about an individual's rights and responsibilities, and his/her role in the society.

"Ask not what your country can do for you - ask what you can do for your country." It's one of the most common quotes that we hear when discussing what needs to be done to develop our country. From our politicians to our civil leaders to general public, everyone uses this quote. So what does it exactly mean? Let's analyse it. The first part "what your country can do for you" implies that the state is the parent and citizens the children and state is there to grant favours and gifts to the citizens. The second part implies, the state is the master and citizens are the servants who have to sacrifice themselves for the country or society. The third way of viewing the relationship between a country and its citizens is, "an individual is a free agent who forms mutual associations with a society for mutual benefit and the state is neither a parent nor a master but the representative of people which is there to protect the mutual interest of the individuals in the society". Hence, the government is there neither to grant us favours nor rule us like we're servants. An individual is the "supreme being" who owns his/her life and the fruits of his/her labour, and society is nothing more than the voluntary association of various individuals. Hence, a society cannot be superior to an individual and cannot demand sacrifice from the individual.

In the presentation "[Introduction to Liberty](#)," you can view this concept in detail. The presentation says that since every individual is a supreme authority in their life and property, no one should have the rights to interfere with someone's life and liberty. It also says that since the government is a mere representation of people, it cannot have any right which the people themselves don't have. Because what one doesn't have cannot be given to the representative.

In the article, "Self-Ownership in Nepalese Society," the author talks about the concept of self-ownership and its inter-relation with personal freedom, private property rights and why it is necessary to realize it for a prosperous society. The author also talks about the present scenario of Nepalese society.

In the article, "Origin of Human rights," the author talks about the origination of human rights and their implications.

In the article, "A man's rights," the author talks about what are the true rights of an individual, and what rights aren't justifiable. The author distinguishes between the essential rights like right to life and property, and the 'unjustifiable' rights such as right to employment, or right to education, etc.

Questions to think about:

1. Is there anything else to a society than a combination of individuals who are in voluntary association?
2. Can the 'society' have more claims to an individual's life, liberty and property than the individual herself?
3. Do you think the state can take away lives or property of individuals justifiably? Most of our political parties claim that state has a superior right to the lives and properties of individuals than the individuals themselves. We have seen our own government practise the idea that since there is a need to build roads, and lands are owned by private individuals, it is justifiable to expropriate privately owned lands for the greater good of the people. What do you think?
4. What is the difference between saying "I have the right to my life and my property," and saying "I have a constitutionally guaranteed right to education, or health, or employment?" What is the distinction between negative and positive rights?
5. The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal has guaranteed 33 basic rights to the citizens of Nepal, ranging from right to freedom and justice, to right to equality, education, health, employment, housing and clean environment. What do you think are the justifiable rights of citizens of a country? What are the proper rights that should be guaranteed by the constitution?
6. Should right to private property be guaranteed in the constitution?
7. What is the main purpose behind having a constitution?

Have an enjoyable read! Please feel free to send us an email if you have any queries.

Note: The discussed articles are below.

Self-ownership in Nepalese Society

When looked upon from the vantage point of freedom, Nepalese society seems to be in infant stage. A mature society implies respect for the right of an individual to enjoy maximum freedom as to what to do with his life, actions and property and hence live a life he chooses while respecting similar rights of others. This viewpoint of a mature society arises from the concept of self-ownership which may seem bizarre to a society like ours. Despite gaining political and civil liberties to some extent as a result of various political movements and revolutions and the impact of globalization, Nepalese society hasn't yet embraced the concept of respect for the rule of law and social and economic freedom.

What is self-ownership?

The concept of self-ownership can be traced back to John Locke who said the individual "has a right to decide what would become of him and what he would do, and as having a right to reap the benefits of what he did." To put it simply, the concept of self ownership means that every person owns himself and is responsible for all his actions, which means that you have the highest claim to your life. No other person or groups of person own your life nor do you own the life of others. If anyone else would have a higher claim to your life than you do then it would imply that you are a slave, not a free person. Every person is equal and therefore they also have the highest claim to their life. So, what person "A" does with his life or his body shouldn't be of any concern to "B" until and unless A doesn't breach B's rights of self-ownership. No individual has the right to initiate force to take away other person's life or liberty. The right to own oneself is hence, "self-evident."

Another facet of self-ownership is that the state is merely a body representing individuals for the sole purpose of safe-guarding the natural rights of its people. Government officials don't enjoy any rights more than we civilians do. Officials don't have the right to take away someone else's life, liberty or property without their voluntary consent. Since we don't have these rights, naturally our representatives can't have that right. One cannot give what one doesn't have is a universal truth. Rights to life, liberty and property don't come from the state they are with us from birth. State is there to safeguard our rights.

Self-Ownership and Personal freedom

A society with respect for self-ownership rights gives maximum freedom of choice to individuals; making them responsible for their own actions which in turn drives the society towards progression through better decisions, competition and innovations. Only in such societies is a person free to choose the course of his life, his religious values, his culture and traditions and live a dignified life.

Self-Ownership and Private Property

The concept of self-ownership and private property are interdependent. Self-ownership states that property is something a person acquires by using his labor and liberty. Property is part of the nature which individual turns to valuable use or something he/she acquires through voluntary exchange. A person has the highest claim over his justly acquired property. No one has the right to exert forceful aggression against anyone else's property. A person is free to choose what to do with his property. He can choose to destroy it, lend it, throw it, utilize it, and underutilize it and whatnots until and unless there isn't any aggression on somebody else's property.

Why is it necessary for a prosperous society?

As we can see that in a society where self-ownership rights of the individuals are respected, every person has to be responsible for himself. He/She cannot think of prospering on someone else's expenses. Every decision she makes and every action she performs is of utmost importance to her as the consequences are to be borne by him/her. When a person feels responsible for herself, she starts acting for her own best interests seriously. When every one feels responsible for their life and starts working to improve their life sincerely, society moves towards progression.

The property right of a person acts as an incentive for him to work more and be prosperous. The people who put more efforts in their life get more whereas people unwilling to work for themselves won't prosper or survive because they can't forcefully take someone else's property. Property right motivates people to work more, innovate new things, use their resources more efficiently and productively which contributes in the economy of a society.

What is the present condition in Nepalese Society?

Self-ownership is a new concept for our society. There are many instances where our culture and practices prevent people from becoming self-responsible. Let take the example of the practice of inheritance. According to our culture and our law, a person inherits the wealth of his parents. A person regardless of his wishes, has to give his property to his wife and children. The children who receive huge wealth from their parents without having to work for it take it for granted. There is no incentive for them to work hard and make a fortune for themselves. If someone's father is earning well, then the son doesn't think it necessary to work for his living as he is sooner or later going to inherit the wealth.

Another example can be the tendency of Nepalese people living with their parents even after attaining adulthood. The free scholarship and free lodging –fooding we receive from our parents is making us less responsible in our studies and life. Most of our youngsters today complain more and take less responsibility for their life.

On a higher level, if we look at our society, even a small problem in the neighborhood awaits the government's action. A strict government is the panacea to all the problems. "The government should take more action...", "Our government should provide us this and that", "That's not my job, the government should do it..." are one of the most common phrases we hear everyday. Our expectations from government ranges from free education, free health services to employment. Our expectations from the government are not only too many but ridiculous as well. Letting government be responsible for many aspects of our life, we have increased the government's control on our lives. There are very few aspects of our life which are free from government control. Letting government take decisions for us, every child born in Nepal has an increasing debt of more than Rs.13000 on his head.

Lack of respect for self-ownership rights appear time and again in our news. Husbands killing their wives for dowry issues and feeling no regret, labour unions shutting down industries, various women groups attacking the beauty pageants and refusing to let the participants make their decision on whether the pageants are using them as commodities or not, security personnel killing civilians, ruling party seizing the property of civilian and refusing to return them are some very common news in our media.

Conclusion

The society with respect for self-ownership rights is the most practical, ethical and prosperous society. It's the society where its members learn to be responsible for their lives and enjoy maximum freedom to shape up and live their lives as they choose. Due to responsible citizens, the resources in such societies are utilized most efficiently and productively. A free and responsible society is the ultimate stage of any civilization. Sadly, our society lags far behind in this regard. While we are talking about a new prosperous Nepal, every Nepalese should realize that the pathway to our goals is a free and responsible society.

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The Origin of Human Rights

This is the 42nd instalment of Thinking it Through, and over the last 41 weeks, I have often bored my readers with talk of “rights” and “freedoms” and so on. Such talk is everywhere—politicians love to speak of rights to display their compassion, and of freedom to display their liberalism. Often, though, these terms are dreadfully misused, and hide double standards that none of our politicians are exempt from. With a humble ponderousness alert, allow me to explain my notion of the basis of human rights.

In my view of the world, the most basic right of all is one that we are born with: the right to self-ownership. All legitimate human rights emerge from this. If we own ourselves, we obviously have the right to life, and to live as we please. Our thoughts and speech belong to us—thus, the right to free speech. Our labour, and the fruits of our labour, belong to us—thus, all property rights. And so on.

All these rights are contingent on our respecting the rights of others— they have no meaning otherwise. For example, my right to free speech entitles me to express myself as I please only when it does not involve an infringement on someone else’s right. If Mint refuses to publish this column, I cannot accuse it of censorship—my right to free speech ends where Mint’s right to property begins. On my own blog, and in a public space, I don’t have to worry about this.

Our politicians, and many commentators, display double standards when it comes to protecting our rights. They would agree that a person’s life is his own property, and that taking it away from him—i.e., murder—is wrong. Equally, they would agree that his labour belongs only to him, and to deny him of it amounts to slavery. But they don’t extend that logic to other human rights that have the same moral basis.

For example, if it is wrong to deny me of my labour, why does it become okay to take away some of the fruits of my labour? If the government marched us off to work for it for four months of every year, most of us would protest and call it slavery. If one-third of our income is taxed, it amounts to the same thing. But we don’t protest. Indeed, if murder and rape and slavery are wrong, then what about import duty and censorship and taxes? The same principle sits at the heart of all these matters—the right to self-ownership. Any politician who defends free speech but opposes free markets, or vice versa, is being philosophically inconsistent.

There is, of course, a utilitarian justification for limited taxes. Our whole framework of rights stands for nothing in the real world if there is no one to protect them. That, many classical liberals like me would say, is the only real justification of government. We accept the taxes necessary for this as a necessary evil. But while the government cannot carry out this basic function properly—the rule of law is effectively absent or at best arbitrary for most poor people in India—it spends most of our taxes on other, wasteful things. Furthermore, it places huge restrictions on our freedoms—and, thus, infringes our rights.

The kind of rights I have described, the ones which arise from the right to self-ownership, are known to philosophers as negative rights. To respect them, others simply have to refrain from infringing them. But politicians have also come up with another class of rights known as positive rights. These require action from others.

For example, people speak of a right to education, or to health care, or to a livelihood. These are all desirable things, but there is no philosophical basis to describing them as rights. Indeed, positive rights directly clash with negative rights, and require their infringement. After all, how can a government provide education or medicines to some people without taking away the property of others via taxes? Redistributing property like this amounts to infringing the rights of some people to fulfil the needs or desires of others. I am not arguing that our government should not fund education or health care, but talking of it in terms of “rights” is shallow and meaningless.

Of course, we do not always make policy in the real world by referring to philosophy and first principles. Often, we look at consequences. And here we find the greatest triumph for the system of negative rights that I have just described. History stands testament to the link between freedom and progress: the countries that wipe out poverty the quickest have been the ones that have guaranteed economic freedom to their people. Social freedoms are equally important to enable a country’s citizens to express their potential to its greatest extent. Human progress is directly proportional to the respect shown to all the human rights that emerge from the fundamental right to self-ownership.

Politicians who ignore all evidence for this assertion are free to do so, of course. I would not dream of infringing on their right to self-delusion.

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A man's rights

If one wishes to advocate a free society—that is, capitalism—one must realize that its indispensable foundation is the principle of individual rights. If one wishes to uphold individual rights, one must realize that capitalism is the only system that can uphold and protect them. And if one wishes to gauge the relationship of freedom to the goals of today's intellectuals, one may gauge it by the fact that the concept of individual rights is evaded, distorted, perverted and seldom discussed, most conspicuously seldom by the so-called "conservatives."

"Rights" are a moral concept—the concept that provides a logical transition from the principles guiding an individual's actions to the principles guiding his relationship with others—the concept that preserves and protects individual morality in a social context—the link between the moral code of a man and the legal code of a society, between ethics and politics. Individual rights are the means of subordinating society to moral law.

Every political system is based on some code of ethics. The dominant ethics of mankind's history were variants of the altruist-collectivist doctrine which subordinated the individual to some higher authority, either mystical or social. Consequently, most political systems were variants of the same statist tyranny, differing only in degree, not in basic principle, limited only by the accidents of tradition, of chaos, of bloody strife and periodic collapse. Under all such systems, morality was a code applicable to the individual, but not to society. Society was placed outside the moral law, as its embodiment or source or exclusive interpreter—and the inculcation of self-sacrificial devotion to social duty was regarded as the main purpose of ethics in man's earthly existence.

Since there is no such entity as "society," since society is only a number of individual men, this meant, in practice, that the rulers of society were exempt from moral law; subject only to traditional rituals, they held total power and exacted blind obedience—on the implicit principle of: "The good is that which is good for society (or for the tribe, the race, the nation), and the ruler's edicts are its voice on earth."

This was true of all statist systems, under all variants of the altruist-collectivist ethics, mystical or social. "The Divine Right of Kings" summarizes the political theory of the first—"Vox populi, vox dei" of the second. As witness: the theocracy of Egypt, with the Pharaoh as an embodied god—the unlimited majority rule or democracy of Athens—the welfare state run by the Emperors of Rome—the Inquisition of the late Middle Ages—the absolute monarchy of France—the welfare state of Bismarck's Prussia—the gas chambers of Nazi Germany—the slaughterhouse of the Soviet Union.

All these political systems were expressions of the altruist-collectivist ethics—and their common characteristic is the fact that society stood above the moral law, as an omnipotent, sovereign whim worshiper. Thus, politically, all these systems were variants of an amoral society.

The most profoundly revolutionary achievement of the United States of America was the subordination of society to moral law.

The principle of man's individual rights represented the extension of morality into the social system—as a limitation on the power of the state, as man's protection against the brute force of the collective, as the subordination of might to right. The United States was the first moral society in history.

All previous systems had regarded man as a sacrificial means to the ends of others, and society as an end in itself. The United States regarded man as an end in himself, and society as a means to the peaceful, orderly, voluntary coexistence of individuals. All previous systems had held that man's life belongs to society, that society can dispose of him in any way it pleases, and that any freedom he enjoys is his only by favour, by the permission of society, which may be revoked at any time. The United States held that man's life is his by right (which means: by moral principle and by his nature), that a right is the property of an individual, that society as such has no rights, and that the only moral purpose of a government is the protection of individual rights.

A “right” is a moral principle defining and sanctioning a man's freedom of action in a social context. There is only one fundamental right (all the others are its consequences or corollaries): a man's right to his own life. Life is a process of self-sustaining and self-generated action; the right to life means the right to engage in self-sustaining and self-generated action—which means: the freedom to take all the actions required by the nature of a rational being for the support, the furtherance, the fulfilment and the enjoyment of his own life. (Such is the meaning of the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.)

The concept of a “right” pertains only to action—specifically, to freedom of action. It means freedom from physical compulsion, coercion or interference by other men.

Thus, for every individual, a right is the moral sanction of a positive—of his freedom to act on his own judgment, for his own goals, by his own voluntary, uncoerced choice. As to his neighbours, his rights impose no obligations on them except of a negative kind: to abstain from violating his rights.

The right to life is the source of all rights—and the right to property is their only implementation. Without property rights, no other rights are possible. Since man has to sustain his life by his own effort, the man who has no right to the product of his effort has no means to sustain his life. The man who produces while others dispose of his product, is a slave.

Bear in mind that the right to property is a right to action, like all the others: it is not the right to an object, but to the action and the consequences of producing or earning that object. It is not a guarantee that a man will earn any property, but only a guarantee that he will own it if he earns it. It is the right to gain, to keep, to use and to dispose of material values.

The concept of individual rights is so new in human history that most men have not grasped it fully to this day. In accordance with the two theories of ethics, the mystical or the social, some men assert that rights are a gift of God—others, that rights are a gift of society. But, in fact, the source of rights is man's nature.

The Declaration of Independence stated that men "are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights." Whether one believes that man is the product of a Creator or of nature, the issue of man's origin does not alter the fact that he is an entity of a specific kind—a rational being—that he cannot function successfully under coercion, and that rights are a necessary condition of his particular mode of survival.

"The source of man's rights is not divine law or congressional law, but the law of identity. A is A—and Man is Man. Rights are conditions of existence required by man's nature for his proper survival. If man is to live on earth, it is right for him to use his mind, it is right to act on his own free judgment, it is right to work for his values and to keep the product of his work. If life on earth is his purpose, he has a right to live as a rational being: nature forbids him the irrational." (Atlas Shrugged)

To violate man's rights means to compel him to act against his own judgment, or to expropriate his values. Basically, there is only one way to do it: by the use of physical force. There are two potential violators of man's rights: the criminals and the government. The great achievement of the United States was to draw a distinction between these two—by forbidding to the second the legalized version of the activities of the first.

The Declaration of Independence laid down the principle that "to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men." This provided the only valid justification of a government and defined its only proper purpose: to protect man's rights by protecting him from physical violence.

Thus the government's function was changed from the role of ruler to the role of servant. The government was set to protect man from criminals—and the Constitution was written to protect man from the government. The Bill of Rights was not directed against private citizens, but against the government—as an explicit declaration that individual rights supersede any public or social power.

The result was the pattern of a civilized society which—for the brief span of some hundred and fifty years—America came close to achieving. A civilized society is one in which physical force is banned from human relationships—in which the government, acting as a policeman, may use force only in retaliation and only against those who initiate its use.

This was the essential meaning and intent of America's political philosophy, implicit in the principle of individual rights. But it was not formulated explicitly, nor fully accepted nor consistently practiced.

America's inner contradiction was the altruist-collectivist ethics. Altruism is incompatible with freedom, with capitalism and with individual rights. One cannot combine the pursuit of happiness with the moral status of a sacrificial animal.

It was the concept of individual rights that had given birth to a free society. It was with the destruction of individual rights that the destruction of freedom had to begin.

A collectivist tyranny dare not enslave a country by an outright confiscation of its values, material or moral. It has to be done by a process of internal corruption. Just as in the material realm the plundering of a country's wealth is accomplished by inflating the currency—so today one may witness the process of inflation being applied to the realm of rights. The process entails such a growth of newly promulgated "rights" that people do not notice the fact that the meaning of the concept is being reversed. Just as bad money drives out good money, so these "printing-press rights" negate authentic rights.

Consider the curious fact that never has there been such a proliferation, all over the world, of two contradictory phenomena: of alleged new "rights" and of slave-labor camps.

The "gimmick" was the switch of the concept of rights from the political to the economic realm.

The Democratic Party platform of 1960 summarizes the switch boldly and explicitly. It declares that a Democratic Administration "will reaffirm the economic bill of rights which Franklin Roosevelt wrote into our national conscience sixteen years ago."

Bear clearly in mind the meaning of the concept of "rights" when you read the list which the platform offers:

- "1. The right to a useful and remunerative job in the industries or shops or farms or mines of the nation.
- "2. The right to earn enough to provide adequate food and clothing and recreation.
- "3. The right of every farmer to raise and sell his products at a return which will give him and his family a decent living.
- "4. The right of every businessman, large and small, to trade in an atmosphere of freedom from unfair competition and domination by monopolies at home and abroad.
- "5. The right of every family to a decent home.
- "6. The right to adequate medical care and the opportunity to achieve and enjoy good health.
- "7. The right to adequate protection from the economic fears of old age, sickness, accidents and unemployment.
- "8. The right to a good education."

A single question added to each of the above eight clauses would make the issue clear: At whose expense?

Jobs, food, clothing, recreation(!), homes, medical care, education, etc., do not grow in nature. These are man-made values—goods and services produced by men. Who is to provide them?

If some men are entitled by right to the products of the work of others, it means that those others are deprived of rights and condemned to slave labor.

Any alleged “right” of one man, which necessitates the violation of the rights of another, is not and cannot be a right.

No man can have a right to impose an unchosen obligation, an unrewarded duty or an involuntary servitude on another man. There can be no such thing as “the right to enslave.”

A right does not include the material implementation of that right by other men; it includes only the freedom to earn that implementation by one’s own effort.

Observe, in this context, the intellectual precision of the Founding Fathers: they spoke of the right to the pursuit of happiness—not of the right to happiness. It means that a man has the right to take the actions he deems necessary to achieve his happiness; it does not mean that others must make him happy.

The right to life means that a man has the right to support his life by his own work (on any economic level, as high as his ability will carry him); it does not mean that others must provide him with the necessities of life.

The right to property means that a man has the right to take the economic actions necessary to earn property, to use it and to dispose of it; it does not mean that others must provide him with property.

The right of free speech means that a man has the right to express his ideas without danger of suppression, interference or punitive action by the government. It does not mean that others must provide him with a lecture hall, a radio station or a printing press through which to express his ideas.

Any undertaking that involves more than one man, requires the voluntary consent of every participant. Every one of them has the right to make his own decision, but none has the right to force his decision on the others.

There is no such thing as “a right to a job”—there is only the right of free trade, that is: a man’s right to take a job if another man chooses to hire him. There is no “right to a home,” only the right of free trade: the right to build a home or to buy it. There are no “rights to a ‘fair’ wage or a ‘fair’ price” if no one chooses to pay it, to hire a man or to buy his product. There are no “rights of consumers” to milk, shoes, movies or champagne if no producers choose to manufacture such items (there is only the right to manufacture them oneself).

There are no “rights” of special groups, there are no “rights of farmers, of workers, of businessmen, of employees, of employers, of the old, of the young, of the unborn.” There are only the Rights of Man—rights possessed by every individual man and by all men as individuals.

Property rights and the right of free trade are man’s only “economic rights” (they are, in fact, political rights)—and there can be no such thing as “an economic bill of rights.” But observe that the advocates of the latter have all but destroyed the former.

Remember that rights are moral principles which define and protect a man’s freedom of action, but impose no obligations on other men. Private citizens are not a threat to one another’s rights or freedom. A private citizen who resorts to physical force and violates the rights of others is a criminal—and men have legal protection against him.

Criminals are a small minority in any age or country. And the harm they have done to mankind is infinitesimal when compared to the horrors—the bloodshed, the wars, the persecutions, the confiscations, the famines, the enslavements, the wholesale destructions—perpetrated by mankind’s governments. Potentially, a government is the most dangerous threat to man’s rights: it holds a legal monopoly on the use of physical force against legally disarmed victims. When unlimited and unrestricted by individual rights, a government is men’s deadliest enemy. It is not as protection against private actions, but against governmental actions that the Bill of Rights was written.

Now observe the process by which that protection is being destroyed.

The process consists of ascribing to private citizens the specific violations constitutionally forbidden to the government (which private citizens have no power to commit) and thus freeing the government from all restrictions. The switch is becoming progressively more obvious in the field of free speech. For years, the collectivists have been propagating the notion that a private individual’s refusal to finance an opponent is a violation of the opponent’s right of free speech and an act of “censorship.”

It is “censorship,” they claim, if a newspaper refuses to employ or publish writers whose ideas are diametrically opposed to its policy.

It is “censorship,” they claim, if businessmen refuse to advertise in a magazine that denounces, insults and smears them.

It is “censorship,” they claim, if a TV sponsor objects to some outrage perpetrated on a program he is financing—such as the incident of Alger Hiss being invited to denounce former Vice-President Nixon.

And then there is [Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission] Newton N. Minow who declares: “There is censorship by ratings, by advertisers, by networks, by affiliates which reject programming offered to their areas.” It is the same Mr. Minow who threatens to revoke

the license of any station that does not comply with his views on programming-and who claims that that is not censorship.

Consider the implications of such a trend.

“Censorship” is a term pertaining only to governmental action. No private action is censorship. No private individual or agency can silence a man or suppress a publication; only the government can do so. The freedom of speech of private individuals includes the right not to agree, not to listen and not to finance one’s own antagonists.

But according to such doctrines as the “economic bill of rights,” an individual has no right to dispose of his own material means by the guidance of his own convictions-and must hand over his money indiscriminately to any speakers or propagandists, who have a “right” to his property.

This means that the ability to provide the material tools for the expression of ideas deprives a man of the right to hold any ideas. It means that a publisher has to publish books he considers worthless, false or evil—that a TV sponsor has to finance commentators who choose to affront his convictions-that the owner of a newspaper must turn his editorial pages over to any young hooligan who clamours for the enslavement of the press. It means that one group of men acquires the “right” to unlimited license—while another group is reduced to helpless irresponsibility.

But since it is obviously impossible to provide every claimant with a job, a microphone or a newspaper column, who will determine the “distribution” of “economic rights” and select the recipients, when the owners’ right to choose has been abolished? Well, Mr. Minow has indicated that quite clearly.

And if you make the mistake of thinking that this applies only to big property owners, you had better realize that the theory of “economic rights” includes the “right” of every would-be playwright, every beatnik poet, every noise-composer and every nonobjective artist (who have political pull) to the financial support you did not give them when you did not attend their shows. What else is the meaning of the project to spend your tax money on subsidized art?

And while people are clamoring about “economic rights,” the concept of political rights is vanishing. It is forgotten that the right of free speech means the freedom to advocate one’s views and to bear the possible consequences, including disagreement with others, opposition, unpopularity and lack of support. The political function of “the right of free speech” is to protect dissenters and unpopular minorities from forcible suppression—not to guarantee them the support, advantages and rewards of a popularity they have not gained.

The Bill of Rights reads: “Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press . . .” It does not demand that private citizens provide a microphone for the man

who advocates their destruction, or a passkey for the burglar who seeks to rob them, or a knife for the murderer who wants to cut their throats.

Such is the state of one of today's most crucial issues: political rights versus "economic rights." It's either-or. One destroys the other. But there are, in fact, no "economic rights," no "collective rights," no "public-interest rights." The term "individual rights" is a redundancy: there is no other kind of rights and no one else to possess them.

Those who advocate laissez-faire capitalism are the only advocates of man's rights.

(April 1963)

Ayn Rand