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The "Freedom Bill" is not liberal enough [1]

Written by **Anton Howes** [2] | Wednesday 4 March 2009

The Liberal Democrats recently unveiled their new "Freedom Bill". Although it has been heralded as the beginning of the counter-attack to reclaim our civil liberties, its lack of ambition and the existence of a number of possible flaws mean that this valiant effort may fail in its early stages.

The proposal for reducing the period of detention without trial is limited in only demanding a retreat from 28 to 14 days when it had the opportunity to call for a much greater reduction. However, this is not the only sign of unfulfilled aspiration. With measures to restore the right to public assembly by increasing the numbers permitted back from 2 to 20, the Bill has missed the opportunity to demand an even higher number.

A proposed reduction in the number of crimes that can be retried in light of new evidence appears to suggest that attempted murder, kidnapping and a number of sexual offences are not considered serious enough, and that retrial should be limited exclusively to cases of genocide and murder. By doing so, the Bill does not defend against Double Jeopardy, which is the retrial for the same crime on the same evidence, but instead attacks the retrial of gravely serious crimes based on both new and compelling evidence - terms already clearly defined.

Finally, the "Freedom Bill" makes no mention of repealing some of the most ridiculous curtailments of our freedoms. There is nothing on repealing the criminalisation of photographing police officers, and perhaps most seriously of all, there is nothing to balance or redress the huge potential to abuse ministerial powers due to the Legislative and Regulatory Reform Act of 2006, a law that allows minsters to ignore Parliament and even directly amend existing legislation at their own discretion.

If Britain is to truly reclaim liberty from its own government, we must have the courage to be bolder and more radical in our demands.

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