

Big-Governments Libertarians

di Murray N. Rothbard

We have been all too familiar in recent years with the phenomenon of Big Government Conservatives, of people who have betrayed and seemingly forgotten their principles and their heritage in a quest for power and pelf, for respectability and for access to the corridors of power, people who have moved inside the Beltway both in body and in spirit.

Not all of us however are familiar with an allied and far more oxymoronic development: the acceleration and takeover in the last few years by Big Government Libertarians, who now almost exclusively dominate the libertarian movement. The weird thing about Big Government Libertarianism, of course, is that it clearly violates the very nature and point of libertarianism: devotion to the ideal of either no government at all or government that is minuscule and strictly confined to defense of person and property: to what the ex-libertarian philosopher Robert Nozick called “ultra-minimal” government, or what the great paleolibertarian writer H.L. Mencken called “government that barely escapes being no government at all.” How extensive has been this development, and how in the world could such a thing happen?

Big Government Libertarianism now permeates and dominates what, in analogy with conservatives, may be called the Official Libertarian movement. From a tendency or what the Marxists called a “groupuscule” two decades ago, libertarianism has developed an Official Movement, even though it has never, thank the Lord, achieved anything like political power. While there is fortunately no libertarian counterpart to National Review to rule over the movement and purge it of heretics, there is a network of institutions and periodicals that constitute an Official movement.

A central institution for more than twenty years has been the Libertarian Party, which beginning early, oddly and in many ways created rather than reflected the movement as a whole. Until recent years, the Party militants prided themselves on the purity and consistency of their devotion to libertarian principle. The libertarian movement, however, has always been far wider than the Party itself. It consists of a loose network of libertarian and free-market think-tanks, national ones that include lobbying groups, who gravitate inside the Beltway, and state or regional think-tanks, who necessarily remain in the heartland in body if not alas in spirit. There are now legal organizations that allegedly pursue cases in behalf of liberty and against government tyranny. The movement also includes two monthly magazines, as well as others that have fallen by the wayside: a relatively affluent but excruciatingly boring magazine based in Santa Monica, California, *Reason*, and an amateurish “fanzine” in Washington State, *Liberty*.

There are also allied networks of institutions which, like an extensive number of “hard money” and investment newsletters, cannot be considered strictly movement outfits but are sympathetic to the cause. The libertarian movement is even large enough to include an incomprehensible “post-libertarian” academic journal, which tries to integrate libertarianism, Marxism, and deconstruction, a periodical doggedly edited by a Chekhovian type of Permanent Graduate Student, except that he is considerably less harmless and better funded than Chekhov's rather lovable character.

The fascinating point is that virtually all of these movement institutions, from the think-tanks to the magazines to the once purist Libertarian Party have, in the last few years, moved at remarkable speed to abandon any shred of their original principles: devotion to minimizing government or defending the rights of private property.

Part of the reason, of course, needs no explanation: a pale shadow of Big Government conservatives who crave respectability, social acceptance at Washington cocktail parties, and, not coincidentally, power, cushy jobs, and financial support. But there is a lot more at work here. At bottom is the point which many of us had to learn painfully over the years: that there can be no genuine separation between formal political ideology and cultural views and attitudes.

Libertarianism is logically consistent with almost any attitude toward culture, society, religion, or moral principle. In strict logic, libertarian political doctrine can be severed from all other considerations; logically one can be – and indeed most libertarians in fact are: hedonists, libertines, immoralists, militant enemies of religion in general and Christianity in particular – and still be consistent adherents of libertarian politics. In fact, in strict logic, one can be a consistent devotee of property rights politically and be a moocher, a scamster, and a petty crook and racketeer in practice, as all too many libertarians turn out to be. Strictly logically, one can do these things, but psychologically, sociologically, and in practice, it simply doesn't work that way.

Thus, Justin Raimondo pointed out, in pondering what went wrong with the libertarian movement, that the early movement of the 1970s grievously erred by deliberately cutting itself off from any sort of right-wing or any other culture or tradition in the United States. Following the spirit of Ayn Rand, of whom most libertarians had been ardent followers, libertarians claimed to be genuine individualists and revolutionaries, totally separate from the right-wing, and bringing to the world their own brand new political revelation. And indeed, the libertarian movement has always been almost willfully ignorant of any history or any aspect of foreign affairs. Arcane syllogisms of libertarian theory, science fiction, rock music, and the intricacies of computers, have been the sum and substance of their knowledge and their interest.

Part of this grandiose separatism, which I did not fully realize at the time, stemmed from an intense hatred of the right-wing, from libertarian anxiety never to be connected with or labeled as a conservative or a right-wing movement. And part of that hatred has come from a broader and even more intense hatred of Christianity, some of which was taken over from Ayn Rand.

To be specific, one important aspect of the recent shift toward statism and Big Government consists of a spill-over, of an infection, of libertarians' political views by their deep-seated egalitarianism. Scratch an egalitarian, and you will inevitably find a statist. How does the libertarians' burgeoning and pervasive egalitarianism square with their supposed belief in individualism, and for allowing every person to rise by his own merit unhobbled by government? The resolution of this problem is much the same as other, more common versions of Political Correctness.

Libertarians are fervently committed to the notion that, while each individual might not be “equal” to every other, that every conceivable group, ethnic contingent, race, gender, or, in some cases, species, are in fact and must be made “equal,” that each one has “rights” that must not be subject to curtailment by any form of “discrimination.”

And so, flying in the face of their former supposed devotion to the absolute rights of private property, the libertarian movement has embraced almost every phony and left-wing “right” that has been manufactured in recent decades.

Shortly before I left the libertarian movement and Party five years ago, a decision which I not only have never regretted but am almost continually joyous about, I told two well-known leaders of the movement that I thought it had become infected with and permeated by egalitarianism. What? they said. Impossible. There are no egalitarians in the movement. Further, I said that a good indication of this infection was a new-found admiration for the Reverend “Doctor” Martin Luther King. Absurd, they said. Well, interestingly enough, six months later, both of these gentlemen published articles hailing “Dr.” King as a “great libertarian.” To call this socialist, egalitarian, coercive integrationist, and vicious opponent of private-property rights, a someone who, to boot, was long under close Communist Party control, to call that person a “great libertarian,” is only one clear signal of how far the movement has decayed.

Indeed, amidst all the talk in recent years about “litmus tests,” it seems to me that there is one excellent litmus test which can set up a clear dividing line between genuine conservatives and neoconservatives, and between paleolibertarians and what we can now call “left-libertarians.” And that test is where one stands on “Doctor” King. And indeed, it should come as no surprise that, as we shall see, there has been an increasing coming together, almost a fusion, of neocons and left-libertarians. In fact, there is now little to distinguish them.

Throughout the Official Libertarian Movement, “civil rights” has been embraced without question, completely overriding the genuine rights of private property. In some cases, the embrace of a “right not to be discriminated against” has been explicit. In others, when libertarians want to square their new-found views, with their older principles and have no aversion to sophistry and even absurdity, they take the sneakier path blazed by the American Civil Liberties Union: that if there should be so much as a smidgen of government involved, whether it be use of the public streets or a bit of taxpayer funding, then the so-called “right” of “equal access” must override either private property or indeed any sort of good sense.

Thus: when Judge Sarokin, soon to be elevated, by bipartisan consensus in the U.S. Senate, to the august federal court of appeals, ruled that a smelly bum must be allowed to stink up a New Jersey public library, and follow children to the bathroom, because it is public and therefore he cannot be denied access, the national chairwoman of the Libertarian Party issued an official statement praising the decision. In the same way, libertarians join the ACLU in protecting the alleged “right of free expression” of bums and beggars on the streets of our big cities, no matter how annoying or intimidating, because these streets are, after all, public, and therefore, so long as they remain public, they must continue to be cesspools, although precisely how this is implied by high libertarian theory is a bit difficult to grasp.

In the same way, the leading left-libertarian Beltway legal activist maintains proudly to this day that he was only following libertarian principle when, as an official of the federal Department of Justice – which in itself is not too easy to square with such principles – he aided the federal judiciary in its truly monstrous decision to threaten to jail the City Council of Yonkers, New York, because this council had refused to approve a low-income public housing project on the grounds that it would soon become an inner-city sewer of drugs and crime. His reasoning: that this resistance was a violation of egalitarian nondiscrimination doctrine, since Yonkers already had other public housing projects existing within its borders!

But not only literal government operations are subject to this egalitarian doctrine. It also applies to any activities which are tarred with the public brush, with the use, for example, of government streets, or any acceptance of taxpayer funds. Indeed, actual government actions need not be involved at all. Sometimes, libertarians fall back on the angry argument that, nowadays, you can't really distinguish between “public” and “private” anyway, that everything is semi-public, and that trying to maintain property rights in such a climate is unrealistic, naive, blind to reality, and generally a “purist” throwing of sand into the machinery of neoconservative or left-libertarian “progress.”

Recently, there was a fascinating interchange between a paleo-libertarian attorney in California and an official of a new California-based allegedly “libertarian” legal outfit, the Center for Individual Rights, run by the prominent neocon David Horowitz, who likes to call himself a “libertarian.” This Center, by the way, is a leading example of explicit neocon and left-libertarian fusion, since its masthead features several prominent members of the libertarian movement.

The paleo lawyer was protesting that the Center is backing the idea of legally prohibiting colleges from setting down rules infringing on what the Center people claim are “the constitutional rights of freedom of speech” of students and faculty. Our paleo critic agreed with the idea of combating political correctness and codes restricting alleged “hate speech,” but he pointed out what not long ago was considered self-evident and unexceptionable, not only by conservatives and libertarians, and by all judges, but by all Americans: that First Amendment, or free speech, rights, can only apply to government, and that only government can infringe upon such rights. Private individuals or organizations can require anyone using their private property to follow rules of conduct or speech, and anyone using such property agrees contractually to abide by these rules. Any laws restricting such rules, therefore, infringe upon the rights of private property as well as the right to make free and unhampered contracts concerning its use.

The Center official, in reply, heaped scorn on such allegedly unrealistic and purist arguments: these days, to official libertarians, almost everything is in some way public, so that, in contrast to every

fiber of libertarian doctrine, “private” and “public” are simply co-mingled. The Center official did not even balk when the paleo attorney used what any sensible person would consider a *reductio ad absurdum*: that, logically, this approach would imply that government should prevent any private employer from firing an employee who exercises his alleged “free speech rights” by denouncing or cursing at his boss, even on company property.

One problem with using *reductio ad absurdum* arguments among libertarians has always been that they are all too happy to embrace the *absurdum*. And thus our so-called “libertarians” are in the process of going further than even Justice Hugo Black in severing free speech from private-property rights, and from exalting the former at the expense of the latter. Even a “First Amendment absolutist” such as Justice Black proclaimed that “freedom of speech” gives no one the right to break into your home and harangue you at length.

“Civil rights” and “free-speech rights,” and the co-mingling of “private” and “public,” are only the beginning of the libertarian movement's Great Leap Stateward. One of the cultural features of most movement members has always been a passionate adherence to the morality and to the practice of so-called “alternative lifestyles” and “sexual orientation” out of favor with traditional or bourgeois customs or moral principles. The high correlation of this “libertinism” with their endemic hatred of Christianity should be obvious.

While this cultural attitude has always been pervasive among libertarians, the new feature is their embracing of so-called “gay rights” as one of the “civil rights” of non-discrimination. Things have gotten to the point where one of the most prominent of the libertarian think-tanks practices its own form of gay affirmative action, hiring or promoting only openly-proclaimed gays, and, at the very least, firing any staff member who is less than enthusiastic about this procedure or about gay rights in general.

At another libertarian think-tank, which deals only with strictly economic matters in its actual work, the No. 2 staff member recently took advantage of the No. 1's vacation to call a staff meeting and to proclaim his gaydom openly to one and all. He then asked the staff's reactions to his fervent announcement, and later urged No. 1 to fire any staffers who had expressed a lack of sufficient enthusiasm for this development.

The Libertarian Party has for many years had within it a Gay and Lesbian Caucus. In the old days, the program of the caucus was confined to urging the repeal of anti-sodomy laws, an unexceptionable libertarian position. Now, however, in our brave new era, the theoreticians of this Caucus are calling for public nudity and public sex acts, something which their colleagues in ACT-UP achieved this summer in a Gay Pride parade in New York City which was technically illegal, but the illegality of which was conspicuously not enforced by the new Republican mayor. One rationale, of course, is that the streets are public, aren't they? and therefore all things must be permitted.

Until very recently, the devotion to gay rights by left-libertarian institutions has been more implicit than explicit, either under cover of some sort of public action or resource, or as their own form of affirmative action. But only last month, a new escalation embraced gay rights openly and officially. David Boaz, a leader in the most prominent left-libertarian think-tank, Cato, wrote an astonishing op-ed piece in the *New York Times*, astonishing not for the venue, of course, but for the content.

The content of the think-tanker's article was unusual on two counts: One, in perhaps a first for a proclaimed libertarian institution, he treats the various anti-gay initiatives across the country as an “assault” on gay “rights,” without discussing the actual proposals which in fact were attempts to prohibit anti-gay discrimination laws. In short, these initiatives denounced by the libertarian think-tanker were actually measures to protect the rights of private property against assault by laws conferring special privileges upon gays. The odd feature of this error is that, if libertarians are competent to distinguish anything, it is the difference between protecting property rights and aggressing against them.

The second bizarre feature of this *Times* op-ed piece is that this prominent think-tanker is chiding conservatives for what he says is “scapegoating” of gays, while at the same time allegedly ignoring

what he considers the real moral and social problems of our time: unwed motherhood and, with a blare of trumpets, divorce!

Why do the conservatives write far more about gays? In the first place, it seems clear to me that unwed motherhood has actually loomed large among conservatives. As for divorce, it seems odd that left-libertarians dedicated to modernism and change should wax nostalgic over the Good Old Days when any divorced woman was shamed out of town. But the real point here is the stupefying and willful failure to connect with the real world in this argument.

Why do pro-family conservatives spend more print worrying about gays than about divorce? Well, for one thing, there are no strident parades of militants of the “divorced movement” marching up Fifth Avenue in New York on “Divorce Pride” day, marching naked and committing sex acts between the varied “divorced” in public, demanding anti-“divorced” discrimination laws, affirmative action for the divorced, “divorced” districts in the legislature, and continuous public affirmation by the non-divorced of the equal or even superior morality of divorce over staying married.

The change has developed to the point where the word “libertarian” has a new connotation when used in the media. The word used to mean opposition to all forms of government intervention. Now, however, “libertarian” in the public mind has virtually come to mean adherent of “gay rights.” Thus, the favorite presidential candidate for 1996 of all libertarians who will not rigidly confine themselves, in thought and in deed, to the Libertarian Party, is unquestionably Massachusetts Republican Governor William Weld, who even refers to himself as a “libertarian.”

The reason for Weld's embrace of this term is not his alleged “fiscal conservatism.” Weld and his acolytes have depicted him as a heroic slasher of the state's taxes and budgets. Weld's so-called “budget-cutting” amounts to taking Michael Dukakis's grotesquely swollen last budget and cutting it by a very modest 1.8 percent, but even this toe-in-water cut has been more than offset by big budget increases every year since. Thus, the next year Weld made up for his fiscal conservatism by increasing Massachusetts expenditures by 11.4 percent; and this year he is raising it again by an estimated 5.1 percent. In other words, William Weld's gesture in cutting his first year's budget by less than 2 percent has been more than made up by his raising the budget in the last two years by 17 percent. That's “fiscal conservatism”? The story is the same on the tax front; Weld's loudly trumpeted piddling tax cuts were more than offset by large tax increases.

But this is all window-dressing to sucker the conservatives. Weld's “libertarianism,” in the minds of himself and his left-libertarian admirers, consists almost completely of his passionate devotion to “gay rights,” as well as his practicing gay affirmative action by appointing to high state positions a large number of open gays. To round out the picture, I should also mention that Weld is a fanatical adherent of environmentalism, and its despotic crippling of the living standards of the human race.

But recently, left-libertarians have not confined themselves to backing liberal Republicans; they have also made a foray into the Democratic Party. Several leading Cato libertarians leaped into the Doug Wilder campaign in Virginia, one of them actually becoming a member of Wilder's finance committee. Presumably the attraction of Wilder over liberal Republican Coleman is that Wilder, in his person and in his life, embodies both the racial and sexual “diversity” so beloved by left-libertarians. It is typical of their political acumen, however, that they jumped enthusiastically onto the Wilder ship just before it sank without a trace.

The virtual mantra for all left-libertarians in weighing candidates to the Libertarian Party has become: “fiscally conservative, but socially tolerant.” “Fiscally conservative” can and does mean very little, usually spending, or proposing to spend, a bit less money than their political rivals, or not raising taxes by a great deal.

“Socially tolerant,” a murky phrase at best, seems to be a code term for a package of several policies and attributes: devotion to gay rights, to civil rights, and generally and above all, to not being “hate-filled,” like the Christian right, Pat Buchanan, and the *Triple R*. While all of us are by definition scowling brutes who emanate “hate” from every pore, the left-libertarians, as many of us know all too well, are just helluva nice guys, their entire beings emitting vibrations of love,

benevolence, and warmth of spirit. And, as we say in New York, they should live so long! In fact, I haven't had the personal experience of neocons that many of you have had, but I can assure you that left-libertarians can match neocons any day in the week as people you simply would not want to interact with. Trust me on that.

Part of "social tolerance," of course, is uncritical and unlimited devotion to open borders; as in the case of most left liberals and all neocons, any proposal for any reason to restrict immigration or even to curb the flow of illegals, is automatically and hysterically denounced as racist, fascist, sexist, heterosexist, xenophobic, and the rest of the panoply of smear terms that lie close to hand. (Although neocons seem, oddly enough, to make a glaring exception for what they loosely call "Arab terrorists.") Things have come to such a pass that the Libertarian Party, which used to be strongly and consistently opposed to any taxation or to any expenditure of tax funds, is rapidly changing its policies and attitudes even on this subject long close to libertarian hearts.

California, this November has on the ballot a wonderfully simple Proposition, called the "Save Our State" Proposition, which can be endorsed by every regular middle-class and working-class American. Those who hear of it, in fact, enthusiastically favor it at once. The Save Our State Proposition simply bars any use of taxpayer funds in behalf of illegal aliens. Most people, of course, think that illegals should be rounded up and shipped home, and certainly not be the beneficiaries of tax-supported medical care, public schooling, and all the rest of the far-flung apparatus of the welfare state.

As you can imagine, every Establishment, every right-thinking group is hysterically opposed to this proposition, and this of course includes Big Business, labor unions, teachers associations, the media, the pundits, the professoriat, and all the opinion-molding elites: in short, all the usual suspects. These groups denounce Save Our State as encouraging the spread of ignorance and disease, and its proponents as hate-filled, racist, sexist, heterosexist, xenophobic, and all the rest. The only groups in favor of Save Our State are a proliferation of unknown, truly grassroots organizations, organizations which try to avoid rather than court publicity because they have been the recipients of numerous bombing threats and death threats, presumably from members of the "illegal community," a community, which in other, not Politically Correct, contexts would simply be called "gangsters."

Our own Justin Raimondo, I am proud to say, is the San Francisco coordinator for Save Our State, and he reports that the head of the San Francisco Libertarian Party (and here I should point out that the California Party is perhaps the only state party which has a substantial membership and is not simply a paper organization), that the head of the San Francisco Party, opposes the Save Our State Proposition – a first among libertarians in opposing a tax-cutting measure.

What is the rationale for the Party's scuttling the taxpayer and the rights of private property in favor of Political Correctness? Because the enforcement of this proposition might pose a threat to civil liberties! But of course the enforcement of any measure, good or bad, might pose some sort of threat to civil liberties, and thus is scarcely an excuse for not passing any worthwhile bill. Borders, apparently, are not only supposed to be open, that openness has to be encouraged and paid for heavily by the U.S. taxpayer. The co-mingling of public and private, the change in the definition of "rights," has apparently gone so far that every illegal has the right to leech the taxpayers of Lord Knows how much. Welcome to Big Government Libertarianism!

Opposition to taxes in fact, is being weakened across the board. Cato has recently come out in favor of the well-financed campaign to eliminate the "personal income tax" and to replace the revenue completely by a national sales tax. The Old Right, or older paleo call that I remember fondly from the days of my youth, was to repeal the Sixteenth Amendment and to abolish the income tax, period. The current variant is a very different proposition. In the first place, it falls for the slogan first foisted on the conservative movement by the supply-siders and then adopted, left and right, by virtually all economists and alleged statesmen: that whatever happens, and whatever changes are made in the tax laws, that the changes must be "revenue neutral," that is, that total federal revenue must never fall.

It is never explained how this axiom got smuggled into alleged conservative or free-market doctrine, or why in Heaven's name total tax revenues must never be allowed to fall. Why in blazes not? To the common answer that we have to worry about the federal deficit, the proper reply, which no one seems to make any more, is to cut government spending by huge amounts; and that means, of course, the old-fashioned definition of "budget cut" as an actual cut in the budget, and not its current meaning of a cut in its "rate of growth" or a cut from some presidential or congressional projection, based on inevitably shaky assumptions, of future growth in spending. As pointed out recently in the Mises Institute's *Free Market* newsletter there are several grave flaws in the idea of replacing the personal income tax by a national sales tax.

In the first place, contrary to the alleged "realism" or "pragmatism" of this proposal, it will not, in practice, result in repeal of the income tax, but rather in adding on of the sales tax to the current rotten tax structure. Secondly, if the "personal" income tax were eliminated, the corporate income tax would remain. In that way, the hated IRS Gestapo would remain intact, examining records and poking into lives. Moreover, a 30-percent sales tax would also require heavy enforcement tactics, so that a new division of the IRS would soon be poring over the records of every retailer in the country. It seems to me that to foresee these consequences does not take a Ph.D. or extensive theoretical acumen, which leads one to question the *bona fides* of outfits advocating this program.

And speaking of *bona fides*: one of the most disgraceful performances of virtually all free-market think-tanks, and of all Official Libertarian journals and institutions, was their falling into line like the many sheep to agitate on behalf of Nafta, and now for the proposed World Trade Organization. The Canadian Fraser Institute managed, with no resistance, to herd almost every free-market think-tank in this country into what they called the "Nafta Network," which devoted an unprecedented amount of resources to almost continual agitation, propaganda, and so-called "research," in behalf of the passage of Nafta. And not only the think-tanks: they were also joined by the considerable number of libertarians and libertarian sympathizers among syndicated columnists, writers, and assorted pundits.

The unfolding process provided us with some grisly amusement. The original line of these left-libertarians and freemarketeers was the Clinton-Bush line: namely, that Nafta was promoting, indeed was indispensable to, the lovely concept of free trade, which had become an article of conservative Republican faith during the Reagan administration. The only opposition to Nafta, therefore, by definition, came from an alliance of confused or more likely evil protectionists, who were either socialistic union leaders, the hated Ralph Nader, or were inefficient domestic manufacturers seeking protective tariffs or were their hirelings. Even worse, were their allies the hate-filled protectionist xenophobes, racists, sexists, and heterosexists, such as Pat Buchanan.

At that point, Pat Buchanan pulled off a master stroke, totally discombobulating the pro-Nafta forces. He pointed out that ardent and purist free-traders such as Lew Rockwell, myself, and the Mises Institute, and people at the Competitive Enterprise Institute, opposed Nafta because it was a phony free-trade measure, and because it piled numerous new government restrictions upon trade, including socialistic labor and environmental controls. And further, that these restrictions were particularly dangerous because they added on international, inter-governmental restrictions, to be imposed by new inter-governmental agencies accountable to no one and to the voters of no nation.

The amusing point was that the pro-Nafta propagandists were forced to make a hurried and immediate change of front. They were forced to add attacks on us, either printing our dread names or relying on general themes. Since they couldn't call us protectionists, they had to fight simultaneously a two-front war, attacking at the same time evil protectionists of right and left, while also denouncing us as excessively pure free-traders, and therefore, in the Voltairian phrase which I am coming to detest almost as much as words like "alienation" and "tolerance," using the best as the enemy of the good. In fact, of course, Nafta and WTO are in no sense "good"; they make the current situation far worse, and therefore qualify as "bads" in any libertarian or genuinely free-market sense.

Some left-libertarians replied to our strictures against international government that only xenophobes and statisticians can worry about “national sovereignty,” because in high libertarian theory, only the individual is sovereign and not the nation. I don't want to comment on this point at length now. But, as far as I'm concerned, it should be almost self-evident to any libertarian that the piling up of larger and higher levels of government can only add to the scope and intensity of despotism, and that the higher these levels go, the less they are subject to check, curtailment, or removal by the subject population.

But increasingly I find that nothing can be taken for granted, or considered self-evident, among supposed libertarians. Indeed, Clint Bolick, one of the leading libertarian legal theoreticians and activists has written a book for Cato, rather astoundingly looking around at today's America and concluding that the real tyranny, the real menace to our liberty, is not the federal Leviathan, not Congress or the Imperial Executive or the increasingly totalitarian despots-for-life who constitute the federal judiciary, no, not these. To the contrary, that the real menace to liberty nowadays are grassroots local governments.

It seems to me that there is very little reasoning, or discourse, that can be used with people who look at American life today and come to these kinds of conclusions. To call such people “libertarians,” much as to call Nafta propagandists “free traders,” stretches those words beyond all meaning or sense. As in the case of the deconstructionists, with left-libertarians we are plunged into a Humpty Dumpty world, where words mean just what they choose them to mean, and the real question is who is to be master.

Speaking of who is to be master, the Nafta propagandists had the unmitigated gall, or chutzpah, to charge the coalition of protectionists and unreconstructed free traders with being in the pay of the evil textile industry. This charge, mark you, comes from institutions heavily supported by the Mexican government, the Canadian government, by Mexican and Canadian lobbyists, and by corporations and donors in the export industries. For one widely unreported truth about American economic foreign policy since World War II, and even since the late 1930s, including government trade negotiations, treaties and agreements, alleged “free trade” and reciprocal trade, as well as all programs of foreign aid, is that their major motivation was to constitute a taxpayers-funded subsidy to export industries and to the bankers who finance them. Talk about people in glass houses!

I don't want to leave the case of Nafta without briefly mentioning the amusing response of the Libertarian Party. Once again, the Party had always in the past been consistently opposed to all forms of inter-governmental restrictions or controls on trade. And yet, the august National Committee, which governs the party in between its increasingly rare national conventions, felt compelled at the height of the controversy to issue a statement in support of Nafta, throwing its entire weight into the debate.

The person who is in effect the ruler of the National Committee is himself a libertarian theorist of note. And either nostalgia for his former views or a certain modicum of integrity impelled him to actually try to answer our criticisms. Unfortunately, to do so, he had to fall back on the sort of arguments formerly used by such sectarian outfits as the tiny handful of people once gathered in such grandiosely named organizations as the International Revolutionary Workers Party. That is: he and therefore the National Committee acknowledged that there may be some problems with Nafta, the international bureaucratic rule might well impose restrictions that overwhelm its supposed free trade features. But, the National Committee concluded, not to worry, because should such a thing begin to happen, the Libertarian Party would throw its great political weight into stopping it. Well, it's certainly a relief to know that the Libertarian Party will hurl its body between Nafta and its inevitable consequences!

As the paleo alliance has become increasingly influential, we have drawn for quite a while fevered attacks by neoconservatives, and now by the burgeoning Official Libertarians. Indeed, Virginia Postrel, editrix of the Santa Monica monthly Reason has, in a sense, specialized in attacks on the Buchananite right-wing. Usually, she denounces it for its alleged opposition to “change”; indeed, she often sounds like the assorted harpies of the media echoing the Clintonians during the

presidential campaign, trumpeting the necessity of “change,” apparently change for its own sake, which she confuses with some sort of Opportunity Society. The real question, however, is change for what, and in what direction? Paleos, after all, are big devotees of change and radical change to boot, except that somehow I think that the type of change we seek – appropriately reactionary and hate-filled – is not exactly the sort of “change, change, change” that this editor and various other neocons and Clintonians like to talk about.

This month, she has an editorial denouncing the anti-Gatt coalition, which the editor very oddly sees as “partisans of stasis...appealing to state power to block the dynamic processes of markets and individual choice.” How she can interpret a measure fervently supported by President Clinton and the rest of the statist establishment as an example of market and individual choice defying state power passeth understanding.

There is another recent instance that also draws the ire of the editor in the same editorial. This issue she also sees as a coalition for stasis trying to block the beneficent processes of economic growth on the free market. Here we have a coalition of liberals, conservatives, local residents, historians, and all people concerned with conserving and honoring America's heritage, trying to block the development of an American history Disney theme park on the grounds of the Battle of Manassas. One major reason for trying to block this Eisnerizing of northern Virginia, is the politically correct history that Eisner's top historian, the notorious Marxist-Leninist Eric Foner, was planning to foist on the unsuspecting visitors to the park.

Foner, by the way, in a striking example of a leftist-neocon alliance, was the main “expert” in the first Reagan year helping Irving Kristol and the neocons to smear Mel Bradford as a “racist” and a “fascist” for having the temerity of being critical of one of the leading despots in American history, the sainted Abraham Lincoln, who in many ways is the leading predecessor of “Dr.” King in enabling us to separate quickly the right-wing sheep from the various species of left-wing goat.

Postrel describes this anti-theme park coalition as “a coalition of anti-growth liberals and blood-and-soil conservatives.” Somehow, it is not surprising that the editor, as a left-libertarian, does not mention and so doesn't seem to be concerned with the projected bombardment of innocent tourists with a politically correct, Marxist-Leninist version of American history. But here, once again, Pat Buchanan threw a monkey-wrench into the works of the left-libertarian propaganda machinery by highlighting the fact that yours truly, in an article in the Mises Institute's *Free Market*, uniquely attacked the Disney theme park as not being free-market development at all, since the project explicitly depends on a subsidy of \$160 million to be contributed by the taxpayers of the state of Virginia.

Is it really pro-stasis, anti-growth, and anti-free market, to oppose a project requiring a \$160 million subsidy by the taxpayers? How does the editor presume to defend her support against such a criticism from someone who, at the very least, may be a lot more libertarian and anti-statist than she herself? Her defense is actually quite interesting if singularly unimpressive. Her comment, in full, is that “the free-market objection that the park is getting state subsidies isn't part of the main debate.” Well, that takes care of *that* argument.

One of the main grounds that have supposedly led to libertarians' hatred of religion is that they, the libertarians, are staunch advocates, above all, of reason, whereas theists are eternally mired in what rationalists like to refer to as “superstition.” Well, it is instructive to ponder the quality of the reasoning power that these people have used in defending their flight from liberty and the rights of property.

Let us now turn to a final measure that illustrates the Great Leap Stateward of the libertarian movement. This is their championing of the school voucher scheme, which the left-libertarians literally wrote for the California proposal voted on, and defeated, last November. Neoconservatives and left-libertarians happily plunged into, and largely financed, the California voucher drive, secure in the supposed knowledge that their only opponents would be the usual array of left-liberals and teachers' unions.

The left-libertarians featured their favorite buzzword, “choice,” which they first applied to women's choice on abortion and now to the expanding choice of parents and children on which schools to attend and whether or not to attend private or public schools. Anticipating the framework of the debate, the voucherites were having their own way, but this time they were, once again, blindsided by an extremely influential article that Lew Rockwell wrote in the *Los Angeles Times*, which the distressed voucherites later ruefully admitted was the greatest single force in scuttling their plan. For Lew bypassed the standard debate by making points that appealed especially to embattled California parents and taxpayers critical of the public school system.

Lew pointed out (1) that the welfare state, and the burden on the taxpayers, would increase instead of being reduced by the voucher scheme; and (2) that while the public school teachers might well oppose the plan, it is more important and more dangerous that the voucher scheme would greatly increase government control and dictation over the private school system, now still largely free of government intrusion. The government always controls what it subsidizes, and in the case of vouchers, the government would be obliged to define what a “school” is, in order to let the school be eligible for the voucher subsidy.

As in all redistribution schemes, the range of choice of the beneficiaries can only expand by restricting the choices of the losers, in this case the choices of the parents of children now going to private schools. Not only did this argument prove to be a blockbuster, but Lew also raised, for the first time I believe, another sensitive and compelling argument; (3) that the voucher plan would destroy the relatively good and now carefully safeguarded suburban public schools, because these suburban schools would be forced to accept anyone who applies from any other school district.

In short: that these neighborhood schools, which are at least to some extent under the control of local neighborhood parents and taxpayers, would now be forced to accept hordes of uneducable and even criminal youth from the inner-cities. The choices of suburban parents would be restricted. Not only would the suburbanites' children be in danger, but their property values, much of which had been built up by moving into districts with relatively good schools, would be gravely endangered.

While Lew Rockwell's last magnificently Politically Incorrect argument met the predictable hysteria from left-libertarians, who accused him of the customary racism, sexism, hetero-sexism and all the rest, his argument was extremely effective where it counted: namely, among the middle-class suburbanites previously inclined to vote for the school voucher plan. There is no greater testimony to the power of ideas, regardless of pre-existing political clout or the extent of funding.

A general note: fourteen years ago, the Libertarian Party ran its best-funded, and therefore its most widely publicized, presidential campaign. The campaign, run by what even then was its decidedly non-purist wing, was asked by the media, now interested for the first time, to tell them in a few words what this “libertarianism” is all about. The campaign's answer: libertarianism is “low-tax liberalism.”

The absolute ruler of that campaign, Ed Crane, is now the head of one of America's most prominent libertarian think-tanks. Recently, he and his colleagues provided another summation of the essence of the libertarian creed. The answer: “market liberalism.” Note that while the older definition made at least a vague reference to lower taxes, the current credo is one that can be agreed to by literally everyone. After all, since most socialists call themselves “liberals,” and all socialists now agree on having some sort of market, this phrase could be, and probably has been, embraced by such not-exactly libertarians as our beloved president, William Jefferson Blythe Clinton IV, as well as by the unlamented last head of the defunct Soviet Union, Mikhail S. Gorbachev. Talk about being respectable and mainstream!

In recent weeks, this same prominent theorist of “market liberalism” has moved to ward off what he sees as the great danger of the rising right-wing populist movement. Instead, he offers as a counter what he calls “The Velvet Revolution,” a term that seems far odder and more exotic in the United States than it did in the Czech Republic.

This Velvet Revolution, which, according to this leading left-libertarian, will limit the federal government “without disruption,” is simply a triad of statutory measures. One is replacing the

personal income tax by a national sales tax, which I have discussed already. A second is term limits; and a third is the balanced budget amendment. The problem with the entire triad is that they will either have no effect or make matters worse; at best, they might con the populist masses into thinking that Washington has been curbed and dropping the whole issue. And maybe that's the point.

Very briefly, the balanced-budget amendment is a fraud and a hoax. In addition to escape clauses for Congress to override the amendment easily, and that it will provide an excuse for raising taxes, and the fact that the federal government can and does easily shift its expenses to "off-budget activities," the so-called "balancing" is only for projected future expenditures and not for the actual budget, and anyone can literally project any future expense.

And, finally, there is no enforcement provided: will all Congressmen who vote for unbalanced budgets be taken out and shot?

Which brings me to the third leg of the Velvet triad: the much-praised term limits. I have no problem with the concept *per se*; the problem is that Term Limits only restricts Congress or state legislatures, and the legislative arm is the one that has lost most power among the three branches of government. Congress and the state legislatures are, of all branches, the only ones quickly subject to public accounting and retaliation at the polls. These are the only people we can get rid of rapidly and peacefully. But contrast the other dangerous branches, which are conspicuously not to be subject to term limits.

There is the Imperial Executive, where only the president is limited, much to the griping of all champions of "democracy." The rest of the vast and swollen federal bureaucracy is not only not subject to public removal, they have been frozen into place as permanent despots by the so-called "civil service" or "merit" system, which was put across on the public by the intellectual and media elites of the late nineteenth century. And finally, there are the real monstrous tyrants of our day, the unchecked and runaway federal judiciary, which enjoy virtually absolute power over every town and village and every person's life. And at its pinnacle the Supreme Court are our unchecked despots for life. If the term limit people begin to advocate, say the abolition of the federal civil service, and two-year term limits for every federal judge, I will begin to take them seriously as part of the solution instead of being very much part of the problem.

In conclusion: I am confident, in contrast to this desperate left-libertarian attempt to draw the teeth of the populist revolution, that the days of Beltway "realism," both among conservatives and left-libertarians, are doomed. There is now a powerful and truly grass-roots movement awake throughout the heartland of America, a movement that is radical, right-wing populist, and possessed of a deep hatred and contempt, first of course for the Clintons and their whole repellent crew, and second, for Washington in general, for the Beltway, its ideologies and its culture, and for all politicians, especially those located in Washington.

This grass-roots right-wing is very different from anything we have yet seen. It profoundly dislikes and distrusts the mainstream media. And, by extension, it has no use for Beltway organizations or their traditional leaders. These grass-rooters are not content to kick into the coffers of Beltway organizations and obediently follow their orders. They may not be "socially tolerant," but they are feisty, they hate the guts of the federal government, and they are Rising up Angry. In this burgeoning atmosphere, the supposedly pragmatic Beltway strategy of cozying up to Power is not only immoral and unprincipled; it also can no longer work, even in the short run. The oppressed middle and working-classes are at last rising up and on the march, and the new right-wing movement will have no time and no room for the traitorous elites who have led them by the nose for so many years.