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THE

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To The Elections

The Reagan Defeat

By now, everyone knows, of course, that it will be Ford vs. Carter in November. It is instructive, however, to ponder the reasons for the narrow Reagan defeat, because it highlights the snares and pitfalls of "pragmatism" in politics. The essence of the Ford vs. Reagan struggle was that Reagan had the hearts of the delegates and Ford their pocketbooks: in short, that the hearts of most of the delegates lusted for hard-rock conservative principle which they thought to be embodied in Reagan; whereas the President inevitably wielded the lures and powers of patronage wielded by his office—a road here, a contract or a job there.

Reagan, in fact, was leading a veritable revolution—a bold attempt by the majority of party militants to overthrow a centrist sitting President, and to replace him by a supposed hard-core conservative. Yet, the thrust and meaning of that revolution was repeatedly blunted by Reagan, Sears, and their advisers, who wished to preserve the fiction that all Republicans were and are buddies together. To do so, Reagan-Sears engaged in a series of evasions and sellouts of conservative principle on behalf of seemingly "pragmatic" considerations. There is no more ignoble sight than men of supposed principle who sell their souls for victory ... and then lose! So that neither their souls nor their objectives are obtained. It is not only that revolutions are never won by the faint of heart; it is also that since Reagan's sole asset was his conservative ideology, his repeated sellouts weakened and confused enough of his supporters in the tight contest so as to ensure his defeat. Specifically, there was: (a) the decision not to wage any contest in the Northeastern states that were the heart of the Ford support—so as not to disturb the party; (b) the monumental blunder of picking Schweiker as the vice-presidential nominee; and (c) the decision to make the major fight at the convention, not on emotional conservative issues (e.g. abortion, detente, the Panama Canal), but on the silly 16c rule — a technicality rather than an issue — which even most Reaganites realized was on shaky ground. In particular, the Schweiker decision angered and saddened enough conservative militants to lose Reagan the critical Mississippi delegation. Bill Buckley's defense of the Schweiker decision on pragmatic grounds was proved inane by the most pragmatic of results: that Schweiker gained no Northeasterners and lost Reagan more delegates than he gained. The most superficial political observer should have realized, for one thing, that Schweiker, considered a lightweight by all who know him, had no political clout in his home state. Notably, for example, as one disillusioned Reaganite told *Newsweek*, after Schweiker, "no one is going to break the law for Reagan", i.e. no one was going to violate his state pledges to Ford in order to vote his heart for Reagan.

Some wag has said that World War II was a conflict between Left Hegelians (Russia) and Right Hegelians (Nazi Germany); in a more trivial way, it is possible to see the Ford vs. Reagan contest as one between Randians (Greenspan vs. Martin Anderson.) *Newsweek* reports that the ex-Randian and quasi-libertarian Anderson was, along with Sears, the most powerful influence in convincing the reluctant Reagan to choose Schweiker. One wonders: does Martin realize that he sold his soul

for a mess of defeat? So far we have heard no mea culpas coming from Anderson or from self-styled "anarcho-pragmatist" Dana Rohrabacher, also high up in the Reagan camp.

Not, of course, that we at the *Forum* are mourning the Reagan defeat. On the contrary, we can all breathe easier at the sending of the dangerous war-monger Reagan and his cohorts back to private life. The conservative revolution was a revolution on behalf of war and militarism (as well as the outlawry of abortion and a crackdown on civil liberties), and so libertarians must all rejoice at the outcome. But the lesson on principles vs. compromise remains for all ideologists.

II The Rusher Defeat

Another cause for rejoicing, this time on a more comic level, was the well-deserved defeat of the attempt of Bill Rusher and other conservatives to capture the American Independent Party and to create a "respectable" New Majority conservative third party. If Rusher and Dick Viguerie had succeeded in their attempted coup, we might have been plagued with a growing "respectable" right-wing populist party of National Reviewish stripe which could have posed a long-term danger for peace and liberty. Rusher had proposed a mighty conservative Republican-Wallaceite coalition that would have jettisoned the rhetoric of the free-market and grounded its ideology on a coalition platform on behalf of war, militarism, and discreet racism. Instead, Rusher and his cohorts underestimated the shrewdness of Wallaceite William Shearer, head of the AIP, who beat off their challenge and nominated the blatantly un-respectable racist Lester Maddox for President. Thus, Rusher et al. were fortunately left without a political home. It couldn't have happened to a more deserving crew, especially in view of their media boasting that they would field a powerful third-party ticket this November.

III The MacBride Ticket

All this leaves the MacBride—Libertarian Party ticket in a happy position. The fuzzily centrist Carter and Ford nominations leave a great many unhappy ideologues in both parties. Furthermore, the differences between Ford and Carter are so marginal that unhappy liberal Democrats might well be moved to vote for a third-party candidate, knowing that Ford is fairly "safe"; while unhappy conservatives might be tempted to vote third-party in the knowledge that Carter is not a liberal ideologue like Humphrey or McGovern. Carter's fuzzy record on peace and civil liberties might, in short, tempt many liberals to leave the Democrats and vote for MacBride who is consistent on these issues; while Ford's lack of ardor toward a free-market might move conservatives to do likewise.

Liberals tempted to kick over the traces are faced with a choice between MacBride and the Eugene McCarthy independent ticket. But surely liberals should recognize a vital point: that McCarthy is purely a one-man movement; he represents no party and no ideological party structure—he doesn't even have a Vice-President. A vote for McCarthy,

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The LP Convention

The 1976 Libertarian Party convention—held at the Statler-Hilton in Washington on the weekend of Sept. 24-26—was by far the best libertarian convention yet held, inside or outside of the Party. This was not only my unhesitating conclusion, but also the conclusion of many other observers, including veterans of Libertarian gatherings, as well as old friends who usually run in the other direction when more than four libertarians are contained in any one room.

The spirit at the convention was harmonious, joyful, and attentive; there was none of the faction-fighting, petty snarling, or ill will that has marred so many other libertarian gatherings. Of course, this harmony was aided by the fact that, as is always the case in even-numbered years, this was not a business meeting of the LP—but the spirit of harmony and solidarity went far beyond this purely mechanical fact.

The happy and welcome spirit of the convention can be attributed to two main sets of facts: the high quality of the speeches, panels, and workshops, and the high quality of the audience. As to the speeches, one distinguished academic at the convention marvelled at the unusually high quality of the talks (and of the questions from the audience as well), comparing it to a scholarly conference rather than a typical political party. Coupled with that admiration, was an equal praise for the consistency and integrated nature of the libertarian thought displayed. The speeches stressed the importance of a peaceful, isolationist foreign policy, of civil liberties as against the CIA and FBI as well as against victimless crime laws, of natural rights, of American revolutionary history, the history of the movement, of Austrian free-market economics, and of individualist psychology. To this observer, the most welcome stress was on the one area where most libertarians need the most firming up: on the overwhelming need for a non-interventionist foreign policy. Here the most important speeches were the masterful and moving pre-peace address of Roy Childs, and the solidly well-informed explanation of the implications of non-intervention by the one firm isolationist among American foreign policy experts: Professor Earl Ravenal of Johns Hopkins and Georgetown Universities. Also notable in the foreign affairs area was the panel on the emotionally explosive issue of the Middle East, in which three of the leading Middle Eastern experts in the libertarian movement: Professor Leonard Liggio of SUNY, Old Westbury, Dr. Steven Halbrook of Howard University and Georgetown Law School, and John Hagel III of Harvard Law and Business Schools and Oxford University, examined the tangled threads of Middle Eastern politics in a masterful and scholarly fashion. Particularly interesting to me were Halbrook's point that the Lebanese "left" is Moslem and pro-capitalist rather than Marxist or socialist; and Liggio's demonstration that U.S. support to the Zionist movement after World War I stemmed from a desire to provide a cover for the anti-Semitic immigration restrictions that the U.S. imposed during the same time. Liggio added that the intensified U.S. support for Zionism after World War II reflected a proportionately more intense U.S. guilt for immigration barriers to European Jews—a process of what Liggio termed the "exporting of guilt" from the U.S. to the Arabs of the Middle East.

Even more remarkable than the quality of the speeches and panels was the quality of the audience. The audience was knowledgeable and attentive—who, for example, could ever have foreseen several hundred well-informed and alert people at a panel on Austrian economic theory? Especially since virtually all non-economists regard economics as the dismal science? But even more, there seemed to be a new kind of audience in Washington, as witness the fact that so many were newcomers attending their first LP convention. Almost uniformly, this audience consisted of "real people", people who work, think, and are active in the real world. Happily, the crazies seem to have disappeared from whence they came. All in all, the L.P. convention was an inspiration and a joy.

Finally, the media coverage of the convention was splendid. The Washington Post covered the meeting in a lengthy article; NBC-TV gave in a lengthy article; NBC-TV gave it over three minutes on the evening news; and at least one lengthy UPI dispatch went over the wires—with all the coverage respectful and favorable.

Who can deny that the Libertarian Party is on the march? □

Libertarianism For Profit? A Letter And Reply

Ed. Note: We have received the following interesting and challenging letter from a subscriber, Mr. Charles A. Jeffress, that deserves publication and a reply. The letter follows:

Dear Editor:

I subscribe to several libertarian publications and I think *Libertarian Forum* is the best. In my opinion it is the only consistently libertarian and intellectually respectable publication our "movement" has. Its pages are free of the Cold War jingoism, American flag idolatry, namby-pamby pacifism, petty sectarianism, and science fiction claptrap so often found in other libertarian publications.

However, I think there is something missing in libertarian strategy which *Libertarian Forum* has never discussed. That is, what does the libertarian movement have to offer its followers besides some future promise of freedom. Nicholas von Hoffman put it quite well in the latest Reason:

"... the damned politicians are always getting up and asking people to sacrifice for some large goal. This really goes against the fact of finite mortal existence. We just don't want to sacrifice for some future goal, for our grandchildren, or for some horrendous abstraction, be it the socialist state or freedom or what have you. What we want, because we're not going to be around that long, is something now."

Of what benefit is libertarianism to us? The more altruistic and fanatical libertarians can sustain themselves with a long and unrewarded struggle for liberty, but most of us cannot.

Libertarians defend the free market because it works. It provides its followers with present benefits. I think a movement that promotes the free market should do the same. There's a fair amount of truth in the H.L. Hunt quote:

"If the world's worth saving, it's worth saving at a profit."

Charles A. Jeffress
Tulsa, Oklahoma

The Editor Replies:

The central error of Mr. Jeffress' thoughtful letter is one made by many "profit-oriented" libertarians: a confusion of the concept of "profit" with mere monetary profit. Profit, indeed, is the aim of every

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therefore, is really "thrown away", because it is purely ad hoc and one-shot; a vote for McCarthy builds nothing for the future.

Most conservatives will undoubtedly do as they have always done—swallow their pride and vote Republican. But those who don't suffer from blind Republican loyalty have three options: Maddox, Tom Anderson of the Birch Society and the American Party, and MacBride. Racists and Birchers will of course be tempted to vote for their own. But surely there are some conservatives who believe their old free-market and anti-statist rhetoric and will vote Libertarian. How many will we see in November?

Meanwhile, the Libertarian Party is winning spots on the ballot of state after state, at this writing in at least 31 states, and the welcome news has just arrived that the LP will be on the ballot in its two major areas of strength: New York and California—the latter the result of a loosening of the formerly impossible state election laws. Nationwide television spots, along with the LP convention in Washington in late September, will hopefully accelerate the visibility of the Presidential ticket. Due to the heroic efforts of MacBride, Bergland, the national office, the state parties, and roving petition-gatherers, the fledgling Libertarian Party is already the nation's third largest party—a remarkable achievement, and one which could scarcely have been predicted a year ago. □

'Benediction' Speech At The LP Convention

The following speech was delivered by the editor of the *Lib. Forum* as the closing, or "benediction", speech at the L.P. Convention in Washington, D.C. on Sunday, Sept. 26.

Friends and Fellow Libertarians:

I must admit to a bit of confusion when I saw that this speech was listed on the convention program as a "benediction". As one of my friends said in disbelief: "Are you going to be praying for us?" Several years ago, when I argued in the *Libertarian Forum* against reading Christians out of the movement, I was charged in some of our more militant circles with having become a "Jesus freak." I suppose that for some of our more humorless critics in the movement, the title "benediction" will be proof enough of this indictment.

But we can all rest assured. For I looked up the definition of "benediction" in *Webster's* and here is what it said: "Act of blessing; a blessing; an expression of blessing, prayer, or kind wishes; a solemn or affectionate invocation of happiness." And while I am not prepared to pray for our cause, I am more than willing to convey an expression of blessing, kind wishes, and an affectionate and even at times solemn invocation of happiness.

For we libertarians have a lot to be happy about. First, we should be happy about this convention, about the excellent and scholarly speeches and workshops built around the vital themes of liberty. It is impossible to recapitulate all of these speeches and lessons that we have heard here; but I would particularly like to commend the stress that has been placed here, and in the Presidential campaign, on the vital importance of a non-interventionist foreign policy. And particularly on the primary stress that has been laid on the moral basis for a peaceful and non-interventionist foreign policy, on the moral imperative of avoiding mass murder, as Roy Childs has so eloquently reminded us. For it is elemental but sometimes forgotten that we cannot have liberty unless we have life.

Also we have something else to be happy about: We are reaching the end of the mightiest libertarian campaign in over a century, and the most explicitly libertarian campaign in all of human history; we have reached

literally 70 million people with our libertarian message in clear and principled and uncompromising form — 70 million who have heard the words and the concepts of liberty for the first time in their lives. We have and will continue to beam our message over nationwide television; we have gotten coverage in the press and the media across the country which we could scarcely have imagined last year when the campaign began.

Of course none of this coverage and this dissemination would have been possible without the literally superhuman efforts of our Presidential candidate, Roger MacBride, who has been campaigning continuously since last year's convention. How he did and is still doing it I don't know; on Roger's schedule I think most of us would have been in a rest home after a few weeks. I can only think that in addition to his natural stamina, that Roger is afire with the spirit of liberty, and that spirit must be sustaining him. And if that last sentence sounds just a teeny bit religious, I guess I'll just have to answer to whatever, or whoever, is the atheist equivalent of St. Peter.

And let us not forget the heroic efforts — the energy and the dedication — of the national office and of the state parties, state MacBride committees and roving petition-gatherers who got us on the ballot in over 31 states! Here we are, a brand-new party with a brand-new ideology, and we are already on more state ballots than any of the other minor parties! Isn't that phenomenal?

To us libertarian veterans, the most remarkable aspect of the vast amount of media attention to our campaign is that the reports have ranged from favorable to neutral, with very few unfavorable comments. And no one has called Roger or the party a fascist, a crazy, or a Neanderthal — a refreshing change from the common epithets of two and three decades ago.

The quantity of media coverage is surely a response to the success of the campaign and the ballot drives. But how explain the good will and even the approval that we find in the media? I think it is clear that the media people themselves are surprised and attracted by this new-found

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market exchange, indeed of every human action; but it is **psychic profit**, that is, the advance of a person higher up on his value scale, the satisfaction of an otherwise unfulfilled want or goal. Chiding libertarians for not "making a profit" would only be correct if no **psychic profit**, no profit in terms of the individual libertarian's own utilities, were being made.

But this would imply that every human action is made in order to obtain a **monetary profit**; but this of course would be an absurd claim. The entire range of **consumption** expenditures is made, clearly not to make money, but to earn **psychic profit** from the expenditure; a person goes to a concert, or buys food, etc. not to gain a monetary but a **psychic profit**. And since consumption expenditure is the ultimate aim of production and the making of monetary income, this demonstrates that non-monetary or **psychic profit** is the ultimate aim of even money-making activities. Ludwig von Mises used to scoff at Dickens' capitalist character's contention that he could not give money to his ailing grandmother because to do so would be to violate the contentions of economists that one must always buy in the cheaper market and sell in the dearer, i.e. make a monetary profit. Dickens' charge was a caricature because it left out the entire range of consumer expenditures which lie at the base of money-making, and which are conducted to yield a **psychic profit** only.

To answer Mr. Jeffress' contention, then: those of us who are "fanatical" libertarians, engaged in a lifelong battle on behalf of individual liberty, joyously earn a **psychic profit** in the course of the struggle. Why? Because our value-scales are such that we consider it of enormous **psychic profit** to us to participate in the battle for liberty, to fight for the most noble and glorious cause of all. We don't consider that we are "sacrificing" either ourselves or our descendants. We consider that a commitment to participate as much as possible in the struggle for liberty gives joy and enrichment to our lives. If we feel that we are

succeeding in bringing the glorious future day of total liberty closer by our efforts, then of course so much the better; but if our best efforts do not eventually succeed (which I do not believe), we in no sense will consider our efforts wasted—for we will consider ourselves happy and privileged to have fought for the glorious cause of individual liberty. That continuing and lasting **psychic profit** cannot be taken away from us.

Mr. Jeffress calls battling for the libertarian cause "altruistic". Since we are continually making a great **psychic profit** from the struggle that term clearly does not apply. But there is more to be said about this common charge. I regard altruism as an absurd and self-contradictory philosophy, in flat contradiction to the nature of man. Consider the old cartoon: a father is instructing his child, rather sententiously: "Our purpose in life is to serve others"; to which the kid pipes up, to the considerable embarrassment of his parent: "What then is the purpose in life of the others?" To say that A should always serve the interests or at the dictates of B, C, etc. is to fail to resolve the problem of the fact that B, C, etc. won't be able to dictate any action either, since still **others** will have to decide on their action. The result of consistent altruism, then, is that no one will be able to act at all. Of course, in practice, as Isabel Paterson said in her great work *The God Of The Machine*, the "altruist"-humanitarian acts and pushes people around on behalf of what he claims are their best interests.

Finally, the libertarian fights for the liberty of all men because he believes that justice requires such a world; since he holds the liberty of all very high on his value-scale, such liberty is to his own "psychic interest" as well as to the **psychic interest** of everyone. The libertarian fights for a world in which he would very much like to live, a world of justice where everyone's rights (including of course his own) are upheld. He wants to exploit no one and no one to exploit him; to write off such a goal of justice for all as "altruism" is to misconceive both altruism and justice, and to posit that the world can only be a jungle in which each man lives either by trampling upon others, or by being trampled upon. ■

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libertarian ideology. For one thing: who else but Roger and the Libertarian Party can offer a coherent, systematic defense of Daniel Schorr? We have struck a chord that resounds in thoughtful people throughout the country, a chord that demonstrates that the time is now ripe for Americans to listen to and heed the libertarian message. Conservatives, as we know, tend to take an aggressive and paranoid attitude toward the media, to write them off as "all a bunch of blankety-blank liberals", and of course the media people, being human, tend to respond in kind.

It is true that media people are similar to most intellectuals in being liberals. But let us examine the mind-set of the typical liberal, vintage 1976. He or she knows, down-deep, that something has gone very wrong with the liberal ideology and with the liberalism that we have all lived under for forty years. He knows that the entire idea that "we are the government", that the government should regulate and control our lives and resources, has gone very sour. After forty years of liberal "fine-tuning" of the economy, he knows that all that has been accomplished is chronic and accelerating inflation combined with periodic recessions, the last one the deepest since World War II. He knows that we are all groaning under a burden of high taxation, taxes that injure and cripple the poor and the middle class as well as the wealthy. He sees that the formerly sacrosanct public school system is in deep trouble, barely teaching anyone and only serving an increasingly inefficient custodial and babysitting function for its charges. He sees that compulsory integration and forced bussing have aggravated rather than relieved racial tensions. He is getting fed up with the idea that the criminal is always to be pitied, while the victim of the crime is either neglected or somehow blamed for the actions of the criminal. Above all, as a civil libertarian, he sees that Big Government, even elected government, has become a tyrant and oppressor of civil liberties, of the freedom to dissent from the powers that be. He sees also that the liberal foreign policy of global intervention and collective security has only brought us endless war, mass murder, and great waste of resources. And since Watergate and the Pentagon Papers, he sees how an unchecked executive power in domestic and foreign affairs brought us close to a police state.

And so the thoughtful person, in or out of the media, has become increasingly disillusioned with liberalism and ripe for a fundamental change in political outlook. Until now, however, the only alternative to liberalism that seemed to be available was conservatism, and conservatism could still only repel the thoughtful liberal ready to become an ex-liberal. Devoted to peace and civil liberties, he sees conservatism as a frenetic call for still more militarism, global intervention and war, and for still more suppression of civil liberties — both in the form of political dissent and of personal activities, or victimless crimes, which the conservative deems to be immoral and therefore to be stamped out by the police. Devoted to the sturdy American principle of separation of church and state, our liberal is hardly likely to be attracted to the odor of theocracy and the Inquisition that permeates the conservative movement.

Given the repellent nature of conservatism, and given the propensity of human nature not to abandon an old belief until a new and better one comes along, our typical thoughtful liberal has generally remained one, in spite of himself — but ready to defect should a better political ideology come along. But that better ideology is libertarianism — and hence the surprising degree of favorable media interest. For only we are consistently opposed to coercive Big Government — in all aspects of American life: domestic and foreign, economic and personal, secular and religious. Only libertarianism brings back to American political life what has for so long been absent — a consistent and well-thought-out ideology, a seamless web on behalf of the liberty of the individual, on behalf of voluntary as opposed to coercive action in all spheres of life.

I have so far spoken of media people and intellectuals; but the mass of the public, too, is ripe for the libertarian message and for many of the same reasons. The public, too, is sick of Big Government and high taxes, of inflation and of government coercion. The mass of the public is not interested in global crusades or nuclear incineration. Above all, the public has a healthy distrust of government and of politicians. There are many signs of this welcome and radical shift in the public mood, but perhaps the most important is that both the major party candidates feel it

necessary to try to ride this mood by campaigning against "Washington." Of course, their campaigns are empty, cynical, and devoid of issues or concrete content. Of course, they will continue to con the public a while longer. But this con job is getting more and more difficult and will only succeed for a while because most of the public sees no viable alternative to the two major parties.

But this lack of an alternative, this common idea that we are stuck with two evil parties of which we must at each election choose the lesser, is rapidly coming to an end. Because we Libertarians are now here to present the real anti-Washington alternative! An alternative that presents the issues clearly and consistently. No one can accuse us of being "fuzzy." And as our message spreads, and as the public realizes that we are here and here to stay, they will turn more and more to the Libertarian alternative.

I would like to try to clarify some confusion that has arisen about the relationship of the Libertarian Party to the broad libertarian movement in this country. The libertarian movement consists of everyone who is active in trying to bring about complete individual liberty. It consists not only of the Libertarian Party, but of many other organizations and associations in all walks of life: including scholars' movements within and cutting across numerous scholarly disciplines; tax-protest movements, such as the splendid mass demonstration in New Jersey last weekend in favor of repealing the state income tax and cutting the budget; organizations opposed to government fiat money, and many others too numerous to mention. It also includes the Libertarian Party, which is the political-action, or political-party, arm of the movement. I regard all of these worthy activities as complementary and indispensable, and not at all competitive. The Libertarian Party comes to put the libertarian ideal into practice in American political life.

Specifically on the Libertarian Party, I see the party as fulfilling four vital and interlocking functions. First, it has proved to be an indispensable method for **building the libertarian movement**. Political campaigns, in the first place, are vitally important methods for **informing** previously isolated libertarians about the existence of an organized party of fellow-libertarians, and thereby spurring the organization of previously fragmented libertarians in every state in the Union. Secondly, the party provides a channel for libertarians to gather together and engage in fruitful and rewarding libertarian activity. In the days before the party, I would often hear newly converted libertarians ask: "all right, now we believe in liberty, but what can we do about it?" Now that we have a Libertarian Party, no one need ask such a question any longer; as we all know, there is plenty to do. Already, in its brief existence, the Libertarian Party has been phenomenally successful, far more so than any and all other libertarian organizations, past and present, in building the libertarian movement, in gathering libertarians together and in providing them important and fruitful forms of continuing activity.

In addition to building the movement, the Libertarian Party has, as we all know, a vitally important **educational** function, in educating the media and the public in the libertarian ideology, in presenting that ideology, and then in changing the climate of opinion in a libertarian direction. I have already spoken of the fantastic fact that scores of millions of Americans have been exposed to uncompromising libertarian ideas for the first time in their lives — and this could only have been done in the context of a political, and particularly of a Presidential, campaign.

Building the movement and educating the public; these two functions are crucial enough and are more than enough to justify our efforts. But this is far from all that the party will be accomplishing in the months and years ahead. In the first place, as we gather in strength and influence and durability, we will find — in the classic pattern of third parties — that we will succeed more and more in pushing the major parties in a libertarian direction. **Not**, of course, because they will be converted to the cause, but, because, cynical vote-seekers that they are, they will have to bend under what they perceive as public pressure. Now, in 1976, they are content to give lip-service to the inchoate mood of being against "Washington"; in the years to come, they will be forced to adopt more and more of the specific stands on issues on which the Libertarian Party will be convincing the public.

Let us contemplate for a moment how great it would be, for example, if the Libertarian Party had a bloc of even a few Congressmen of our very

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Storm Over The 'Scum': Defending The Undefendable Block

I must confess to a degree of astonishment at the range and depth of the emotional hostility to Walter Block's excellent new book, **Defending the Undefendable**—in libertarian circles. In his book, Block takes the libertarian position and applies it, with lucidity, logic, and wit, to the "hard" and extreme cases, thereby forcing the reader to widen and deepen his understanding of libertarian principles. After all, it doesn't take any truly radical or consistent spirit for someone to favor legalizing the activities of the natural gas producer or the steel manufacturer, and to see why his activities, left unhampered by government, benefit the consumers. **Anyone**, even President Ford, can see why the airlines or railroads should be deregulated and left to the free market. But the blackmailer, the libeller, the dishonest cop, the pimp, the curmudgeon, etc? Here, support for their activities comes a lot harder. As I wrote in my introduction to the Block book:

"These case studies also have considerable shock value. By relentlessly taking up one 'extreme' case after another that is generally guaranteed to shock the sensibilities of the reader, Professor Block forces the reader to think, to rethink his initial knee-jerk emotional responses, and to gain a new and far sounder appreciation of economic theory and of the virtues and operations of the free market economy. Even many readers who now **think** they believe in a free market must now be prepared to grasp fully the logical implications of a belief in a free economy. This book

will be an exciting and shocking adventure for most readers, even for those who believe that they are already converted to the merits of the free market economy."

Judging from the outraged responses to the Block book in many libertarian quarters, apparently many of "our people" are not ready for this exciting and shocking adventure. Since libertarians are, or are supposed to be, on the forefront of thought, since their whole lives have been an intellectual adventure in many ways, the hostility to the Block book becomes even more mysterious. In contrast to so many of our radical and hard-core libertarians who balk at Block, let us consider the commentary on the book published in its pages by F. A. Hayek, a distinguished free-market economist who has never been known either as a flaming radical or as a daringly consistent libertarian. Hayek writes: "Looking through **Defending the Undefendable** made me feel that I was once more exposed to the shock therapy by which, more than fifty years ago, the late Ludwig von Mises converted me to a consistent free market position. Even now I am occasionally at first incredulous and feel that 'this is going too far', but usually find in the end that you (Block) are right. Some may find it too strong a medicine but it will do them good even if they hate it." If F. A. Hayek can show himself willing to rethink his premises and apply libertarianism consistently and "extremely" in his late seventies, this points up even more starkly and ironically the stodgy and conservative (in the bad sense) habits of mind that seem to be

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own. By their speeches and above all by the consistency of all of their votes, they would show a first astonished and then delighted press and public what libertarianism in action really means. For most people, an ideology only comes alive if they can see its application in the concrete, and we could then show them plenty — even to voting, year after year, against the overall budget! Think of the great educative and pressure value of such an openly Libertarian bloc in Congress!

All of these functions: movement-building, public education, pressure on the major parties; are now within our grasp. But ultimately we cannot rely upon the statist parties to complete our vital task of rolling back the Leviathan State, of gaining a world of full individual liberty. To do so, we must aspire to be the eventual conduit, the channel, for that rollback of the State. We must aspire to become one of the major parties ourselves.

Of course there are risks involved; but we of all people can overcome them, because we know full well that eternal vigilance is the price of liberty. We must take care never to compromise or water down our glorious libertarian principles which are the very point and the heart of our existence, as a party and as a movement. I am confident that we can and will do this, because our record so far shows that we are determined never to water down those principles! Moreover, those libertarians who are opposed to political action have failed dismally to come up with a single sensible alternative strategy for rolling back the State; the State is not going to disappear or fade away out of shame; it will have to be pressured into having its scope and its power whittled away. Who but a Libertarian Party is going to roll back the State and repeal all the statist measures that have been oppressing us?

Let us consider the experience of the ballot drives, the launching of active candidacies at the local level, the filming and showing of national TV spots. Let us consider these experiences in the light of our proud boast that we are the party of principles. All this hard work around the country has been inspired by the love of liberty and it has been work devoted to the cause of liberty. That is the cause that justifies our passionate efforts. That is the end that justifies our organizing a means of social transformation.

But we are not simply motivated by a passion for liberty. We are not only the party of principle; we are the party of principles. We are an organized, increasingly coherent political organization. The ballot drives,

the TV spots, are all part of a professionally-run, integrated, disciplined, coordinated, purposive effort to advance the libertarian cause. Give us a coherent organization and, inspired by the love of Liberty, we will transform America.

We have a glorious opportunity now and in the future, to succeed in all these aims. For not only is the climate of opinion among intellectuals and the public ripe for libertarian ideas, but the two-party political system is breaking up before our very eyes. The Republican party has virtually disintegrated, a disintegration only masked by the fact that it is still viable on the Presidential level. But the Republicans have only a handful of governors, and not only have the Republicans not controlled either branch of Congress in twenty-two years, but there is no prospect of the Republican party doing so ever again. Surely this situation cannot continue indefinitely, and in a few years a fundamental realignment of parties will have to take place. Since we Libertarians are already, despite our infancy in terms of years, the largest of the minor parties, and since we stand for something in an age of cynical fuzziness and absence of ideology, the chances are excellent for us to arrive before long at major party status.

In this and in future elections, we have the potential to obtain, not only the votes of outright libertarians, but of two other large and important groups. We have the potential of attracting those liberals who place peace and civil liberties above federal spending on their list of priorities; and we have the potential of attracting those conservatives who place a free-market economy and minimal government higher than their devotion to theocratic suppression and global military intervention. Let us hope that these people are legion.

I have no idea how many votes we are going to get in November. Whatever the figure, it will be infinitely more than we could have dreamed or expected four, or even two, years ago. We are going to make, a mighty impact in this election. We have already made a mighty impact. But we know, and the public should know, that this election is only the beginning. We are here to stay, and we are going to have ever greater influence in the months and years ahead. We are the party of the future. Just look around at us; I venture to say that I am by far the oldest person in this room, maybe in the entire Libertarian Party, and I am still not ready for the rocking chair. We are the party of youth, of youth and of hope. And we have the truth on our side, as well as a ripening disgust among the public at the old world of statism and tyranny. With all this going for us, how can we help but be the party of the future? ■

'Scum' — (Continued From Page 5)

endemic among libertarians who are less than half his age. Apparently, the young at heart is not a matter of chronology.

Before dealing with the specific critical reviews of the Block book by libertarians, we may treat two general themes that appear in them all, as well as in oral criticisms of the book. Why is Block defending, they want to know, what they often refer to as "the scum of the earth"? Apart from the general answer that the occupations that Block is treating (a) should be legal, as voluntary acts between consenting adults, and (b) provide productive services to the consumers on the market, we come to the highly loaded term "scum of the earth". Are the prostitute, the pimp, the drug addict, the dishonest cop, etc. really the "scum of the earth"? This is a pretty drastic social label to apply to a whole category of occupations, and it seems to me incumbent on the "scum" labellers to prove these wild-swinging charges. Why are they the scum of the earth (if, indeed, this term itself can be rationally defined), and on what ethical theory are they so dismissed? So far, none of the Block critics has come up with any ethical theory to justify this label.

The other major cavil is at Block's use of the term "hero" to apply to these occupations. As Block, I believe makes clear in his book, he applies the term "hero" to these "scum" because (a) they are engaging in activities that supply desired services on the free market, activities which should be legal; and (b) they persist in doing so despite social obloquy and outlawry or suppression at the hands of the State. As Block writes in a letter defending his use of the "hero" concept: "there is nothing intrinsically heroic about the grocer who earns a profit. There are no popular songs extolling his virtues. Nor is the grocer the subject of any great epic poems. Nevertheless, when the totalitarian state prohibits 'speculation' in food, in cases of shortages or famines, it is easy to show that the ordinary profit-earning grocer can be a hero...I admit that no one but a libertarian would consider the food speculator 'heroic'. But this is not, I maintain, because of a misuse of the word. It is because only a libertarian could combine an economic analysis showing the beneficial effects of speculation with a moral analysis defending the full rights of voluntary free trade."

And even if we turn to the non-libertarian Webster's, we find one of its definitions of "hero" that is relevant to Block's usage: "a person of distinguished valor or enterprise in danger, or fortitude in suffering" — which can surely apply to Block's case studies, and which says nothing about the intrinsic nobility or epic nature of the enterprise itself.

I hasten to add that I am not at all opposed to sharp intellectual debate within the libertarian movement. On the contrary, one of the reasons for the moribund nature of the conservative movement is that conservative intellectuals have tended to engage in logrolling and back-slapping to the point where important intellectual differences are slurred and papered over, in the name of a phony "unity" against the foe — as a result, intellectual issues never get defined and theory never gets advanced. The rare importance of the late Frank Meyer to conservative intellectual circles for twenty years was the fact that he, almost alone, was willing to engage in such important debates, and often against close personal friends: hence, the fame of the Meyer-Burnham, Meyer-Bozell, Meyer-Kirk, etc. debates — debates that became famous partially because any intellectual argument has been so rare in conservative circles. So it is not the fact of the storm of criticism against the Block book that I deplore, but rather that the criticism is so wrong-headed.

There is, furthermore, a double-standard that is often at work in these attacks. For libertarians, too, have tended to log-roll and to "accentuate the positive" in book reviews — a very human tendency in an embattled movement, to be sure — so that sometimes one had the feeling that anyone who writes a book devoted to "freedom, man, is groovy", is assured rave reviews in much of the libertarian media. But, all of a sudden, with the appearance of the Block book, standards are sharply raised, and every aspect is considered with a caustic eye.

Let us now turn to some of the detailed reviews in the libertarian press. Jim Davidson, in *Libertarian Review* (July-August, 1976) has three basic criticisms which he pursues at length. First is the hero definition, where Davidson asserts that classically "hero" meant "a man of superhuman strength of ability who was favored by the gods", who even "was like a god." Well, sure, but usage has changed since Homer's day, and Block's definition, as I have pointed out above, comes within the rubric of modern

usage combined with libertarian and free-market economic insight. Surely, Block would agree that the pimp, etc. is not a Homeric hero.

Secondly, Davidson maintains that the Block book is not a "work of art", does not come close, for example, to George Bernard Shaw. No doubt; but if we start applying such high stylistic standards to every libertarian book, or indeed to any book at all in this century, we would have to burn all the libraries. Block's style is readable, lucid, and interesting; to demand any more in this day and age is to be Utopian in the unfortunate sense.

Thirdly, Davidson criticizes Block for not enriching his logic with examples, anecdotes, and a critique of modern and classical legal theories. Here, I think Davidson has also raised an unrealistic standard, and is really saying that if he had written the book, it would have been done differently. Walter Block's forte is logical analysis rather than empirical anecdote; he is a formidable libertarian and economic theorist rather than an historian or legal critic. We can't demand that everyone know everything for a book to be valuable. In a sense, it as if Mises' *Human Action* is to be criticized for not having enough historical examples, for being pure theory. The book should be weighed on its own grounds, and logic and sound theory are surely not in such superabundant supply that we can dismiss it on this sort of grounds.

Laissez-Faire Books considered the Block book so controversial that two contrasting reviews are offered (Summer, 1976). Roy Childs' favorable review is excellent, even though space considerations necessarily make it all too brief. Childs commends the book as "challenging, brilliant, relentlessly argued", as "shocking, audacious, and awfully funny"; and as taking "seriously Ayn Rand's dictum that one should be willing to defend the least attractive instance of a principle, and has done precisely that." Childs, too, criticizes Block's use of the term "heroic" because "what we mean by 'heroic' includes great or important values being at stake". Again, not necessarily; it is certainly permissible to take as "heroic" the formal struggling for whatever a person's goals may be, against great odds, and against State outlawry. Words do not have only one definition.

Sharon Presley's con review in *Laissez-Faire Books* I must simply pass over as an embarrassment. In addition to the now familiar charges about the word "hero" and accusing Block of not being as witty as H. L. Mencken, Miss Presley engages in hysterical verbal overkill. For example, she repeatedly attacks the book as "an affront to human dignity". Since Block is trying to rescue the dignity of his much-maligned "rogues", the term is rationally incomprehensible as applied to the book.

We turn now to the most substantial critique of the Block book that has yet appeared, that of Walter E. Grinder in his column in *Libertarian Review* (September-October 1976). Grinder writes that he is "extremely ambivalent" about the book; he is in "full agreement" with Block's basic thesis; the book is "ideologically sound", and even highly "important" and "seminal." And yet? Grinder has two basic objections. First, while he understands and even agrees with Block's use of the term "hero", that Block is defending "the very scum of the earth". Again, Grinder offers no ethical theory in defense of this serious charge. Perhaps a clue is Grinder's reference to "low-character, high-risk people who would likely fill any nonlegal...professions..." There is no question about the fact that non-legal occupations tend to attract a penumbra of what libertarians would consider real criminals: thieves, muggers, etc., since all have been placed unjustly in the same "criminal" boat by the State. But surely the way out of this is, as Grinder recognizes, to remove the stain of illegality, and thereby withdraw the criminal penumbra from all these useful but now illegal or suppressed activities. Besides, even unesthetic people can take on the character of "hero" if they determinedly and therefore heroically persist in legitimate activities that are treated as illegal by the State.

But Grinder's basic objection, as he points out, is strategic. He is worried that "defending the dregs" of society is a "short-run strategic disaster" (a point that Presley also seems to be making.) In the long-run, however, Grinder is optimistic about the Block book, because even though "it will not play well in Peoria", "it will surely lead other scholars to take up each point raised by Block and set it into legal and historical perspective." But, for now, says Grinder, "this is the wrong book at the wrong time." I think the problem here is Grinder's evaluating a book as being strategic or un-strategic. Books are, or should be, timeless, and

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A Letter From Britain

Two centuries after the American people rejected the twin tyrannies of King and Parliament, the status of Liberty in the old "mother country" is still considerably worse than in the United States. The bright hopes engendered among all libertarians in the heyday of 19th century classical liberalism were dashed by the collapse of liberal England during World War I and the triumph of state socialism in the aftermath of World War II. The spectrum of English political life does not include any significant organized libertarian movement. The Conservative party includes a few outspoken advocates of the free market, but the party as a whole is interventionist when in office, chauvinist, imperialist, and overtly (Enoch Powell) and covertly (anti-Celtic, pro-South African) racist. It has been unable to escape its image as the enemy of the working class. The Socialist or Labour party is deeply divided between its Marxist left wing and democratic socialist right wing, retaining power largely by appealing to class envy and fear. The Liberal party has recently enjoyed a slight revival as several million middle class voters, disgusted with the Labor-Conservative incompetents, turned Liberal as a protest. The Liberals have survived as a minority party largely due to the loyalty of neglected minorities in the Celtic regions - Wales, Scotland and Cornwall - and the far north of England. But the rise of the Welsh and Scottish nationalist parties may weaken the Liberals, as it has both other parties in the Celtic lands. However, as the Liberals have recently voted on two occasions to maintain the minority Labor party in office, at the next election it will have to justify these votes, and its support for the nationalization of Britain's aircraft and shipbuilding industries. And if Wales and Scotland continue to support their growing nationalist parties, the Liberals and Laborites may both decline as the margin of their winning majorities traditionally come from the Celtic realms.

What is the state of Liberty in Britain in the summer of America's Bicentennial of the Revolution? Let us look at one issue which was much in the news.

The Right To Work: A major effort is underway to impose the closed shop on British workers in both private and state-owned industries. Daily reports in the newspapers indicate that the trade union movement is becoming militant in demanding that private employers and the directors of nationalized industries consent to making union membership a contractual condition for all employees. Avoiding for the moment coercion through an act of Parliament, which might not succeed due to Labour's minority status therein, the same ends can be achieved by administrative fiat or employer connivance. There is no law requiring secret balloting in union elections, and British workers are notoriously apathetic in participating in the internal governance of the unions. One result has been that the leadership of the unions has tended to fall into the hands of the more extreme Leftists, and outright Communists, who wield power wholly out of proportion to their numbers. But in any real crisis between labor and management or capital, the strong class character of British society rallies the blind loyalty of the workers to the trade union leadership. This class solidarity made democratic reform of the trade unions impossible when it was attempted by the Conservative government in 1974, and instigated the subsequent fall of that government and its loss of the general elections that year. A crucial difference between British and American societies is the different perception of social class. In England, unlike America, the ruling class is extremely visible and their presence and privilege a pervasive irritation to the self-respect of the lower classes. Historically, the working class has used a variety of social institutions to defend themselves against the arrogance and despotism of the ruling elites: the free churches, the trade unions, the old Liberal party, and more recently, the Labour party. The Conservative party has not been able to achieve credibility as a friend of the working class, or the poor. Thus, instead of the rather fuzzy and undetermined class character of American political parties the two major British parties have a hard core bitter class basis. The minor parties, the Liberals, the Welsh and Scottish Nationalists and the Ulster Unionists, represent marginal forces in the total society, forces which have been largely ignored by the dominant Labour and Conservative parties until recently.

The only force that might turn the British away from further

erosion of civil and economic liberty is the Conservative party now under the leadership of Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, whose rhetorical devotion to the free market is manifest. But in practice, the Tories are notoriously unprincipled and have invariably been more socialist in office than out of office. On the vital issue of the closed shop, the Tory shadow cabinet under Mrs. T's leadership has decided to do nothing officially in the Parliament to protect the open shop by statute. Rather, the issue is to be avoided until public opinion can be aroused and changed. To their credit, a few Conservative and Liberal M. P.'s have protested this unprincipled stand and have joined with other civil libertarians in creating a new organization - the National Association for Freedom - to challenge the continued drift towards despotism. It has begun to publish a fortnightly newspaper - *The Free Nation* (87 Regent St. London W1A 2BU.5 pounds p.a.), established local branches and raise funds for legal action. NAFF hopes to take the case of dismissed employees, victims of the closed shop, to the European Court for Human Rights at Strasbourg and has begun making contact with other groups concerned with civil liberties, including doctors who are trying to prevent passage of a Labour party bill which would prohibit the use of hospital facilities by physicians in private practice or their patients. Since there are few private hospitals, the bill in effect would complete the socialization of medical care. NAFF also hopes to rally opposition to "incomes policies" - price and wage controls, further nationalization of industry, and new plans to make land tenancies virtually hereditary. Thus NAFF could be a rallying point for libertarian oriented activities in Britain, and perhaps give libertarian backbone to the Tory and Liberal politicians at Westminster. Considering the past record of the Tory party, we are not too sanguine about the future of liberty in England, but the economic crisis is so great that it may provide the necessary radical solvent for a libertarian "great leap" forward. (J. R. P.)

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should be written for their truth value; the true writer or scholar should not give a damn whether his book will "play in Peoria." Where strategy or tactics come in is the use any given individual makes of any book. Block's book could possibly be used in a counter-productive strategic manner; but so also could any book, including Nock, Mises, Hayek, or what have you.

For example, suppose that someone comes to me who knows nothing at all of economics, and wants me to advise him what book to read first. For me to recommend Mises' *Human Action* or Hayek's *Prices and Production* would be strategic folly, because the person in question would undoubtedly be confused by the whole matter, and drop the subject for good and all. Instead, one recommends to the neophyte, say, Hazlitt's *Economics In One Lesson*, and other elementary books, and then works one's way up to the more advanced and complex material. This, indeed, is true of any course of study. Yet, if I were to recommend the "wrong book at the wrong time" to this person, the fault would not be Mises' or Hayek's but mine, for failing to gauge properly the level of comprehension of this person at the present time. To require that a book be strategic instead of an individual's use of that book in any given situation, verges on thought control and the suppression of scholarship and is, to boot, itself a bad strategic mistake.

Furthermore, it is by no means always true that intellectual "shock treatment", such as offered by the Block book, is counter-productive. It worked on Hayek, and it works on others as well. Block reports that he has had a far greater success in converting his students to libertarianism via *Defending the Undefendable* — via this seemingly counter-productive "shock treatment" — than he did in all of his previous years of teaching, and of recommending more cautious and sober libertarian works. Students, in particular, often admire consistency and "extremism" in the defense of any cause, including liberty. Extremism is not only consistent,

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Recommended Reading

Robert Paul Wolff, *In Defense of Anarchism* (Revised edition, paper, New York: Harper & Row, 1976, 118 pp., \$1.95). In 1970, the hardcover edition of this book by a distinguished political philosopher not only pioneered on behalf of anarchism in academia but also made the entire topic, for the first time, academically respectable. Wolff's slim book developed the case for anarchism from a grounding in the Kantian principle of the autonomy of the individual. This edition is far superior to the original, for it includes an excellent 30-page rebuttal by Wolff to the attack on his previous edition by Jeffrey H. Reiman, in his apologia for the state, *In Defense of Political Philosophy: A Reply to Robert Paul Wolff's In Defense of Anarchism* (Harper & Row, 1972). Must reading for the libertarian.

Carl Watner, *Towards A Proprietary Theory of Justice* (published by Carl Watner, 7250 Washington Boulevard, Baltimore, Maryland 21227, July 1976, 47 pp., \$3.00). Watner's pamphlet is an excellent introduction to the basic philosophy of libertarianism—to its axioms and corollaries, to the principles of self-ownership, homesteading, justice, and free exchange. Relies heavily on Rothbard and Spooner.

Joseph Stromberg, "Non-Intervention: Foreign Policy for Americans," *L. P. News* (July-August, 1976), pp. 3, 9. If there is anything that the libertarian movement is weak on it is foreign policy, so this makes particularly welcome the scintillating article by Joe Stromberg which is also a Libertarian Party position paper for this campaign. Solidly anti-interventionist and anti-imperialist.

Rothbardiana. The biggest news on the Rothbardiana front is an interview with Rothbard in the October *Penthouse*, written by James Dale Davidson. There is also a picture (not the centerfold!) Thus, libertarianism gets beamed out to *Penthouse's* five million or so readers. In the last few months, Murray Rothbard has authored one book, and contributed to three others. The new Rothbard book is Volume III of *Conceived in Liberty, Advance to Revolution, 1760-1775* (Arlington House, 1976, \$12.95, 373 pp.), which treats the origins of the American Revolution until the outbreak of actual war at Lexington and Concord.

Two of the other contributions are to books in the new Austrian economic series being published by Sheed & Ward. In E. Dolan, ed., *The Foundations of Modern Austrian Economics* (Sheed & Ward, 1976, \$12.00, 238 pp.), Rothbard contributes articles on: "On the Method of Austrian Economics," "New Light on the Prehistory of the Austrian School," "Praxeology, Value Judgments, and Public Policy," and "The Austrian Theory of Money." In L. Moss, ed., *The Economics of Ludwig von Mises* (Sheed & Ward, 1976, \$12.00, 129 pp.), Rothbard has an article on "Ludwig

von Mises and Economic Calculation Under Socialism."

The final contribution is a part of an excellent new collection of articles on New Deal foreign policy, edited by Leonard P. Liggio and James J. Martin, *Watershed of Empire: Essays on New Deal Foreign Policy* (Colorado Springs, Col.: Ralph Myles Pub., 1976, 219 pp., available in both hard cover and a \$3.95 paperback.) Of an unusually high quality for a symposium, the book includes: a preface by Felix Morley, an introduction by Leonard Liggio, and the following articles: Robert J. Bresler, "The Ideology of the Executive State: Legacy of Liberal Internationalism;" Murray N. Rothbard, "The New Deal and the International Monetary System;" Robert Freeman Smith, "The Good Neighbor Policy: The Liberal Paradox in United States Relations with Latin America;" Lloyd C. Gardner, "New Deal Diplomacy: A View from the Seventies;" Justus D. Doenecke, "Power, Markets, and Ideology: The Isolationist Response to Roosevelt Policy, 1940-1941," William L. Neumann, "Roosevelt's Options and Evasions in Foreign Policy Decisions, 1940-1945;" and James T. Patterson, "Robert A. Taft and American Foreign Policy; 1939-1945." A superb book!

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it is also exciting, whereas more cautious and gradualist works may well put these eager, budding students to sleep. Liberty, after all, is and should be exciting, and not another typical academic exercise in boredom. In short, "shock treatment" will work for some, and not for others, and both approaches are fine, depending upon the individuals in question. In the 1930's, many people were converted to Communism by the gradual route, through an escalating series of front groups; but others were converted all at once, by the seeming grandeur and consistency of the open Communist position. Are we to deny that rapid and exhilarating route to budding libertarians?

In a letter defending his book, Block points out that whether or not it will "play in Peoria", the most hostile attacks on the book have so far come, not from "Peorians" but from libertarians. It is a fair comment. Strategy and tactics are important; but let us not become so concerned with the opinion of others, so other-directed, that we begin to discourage and stifle our best libertarian writing and scholarship in the name of how we think other people are going to react. The great glory of libertarianism is that we must follow our libertarian star and let the chips fall where they may; if we ever forget this primordial fact, we shall be in trouble indeed. ■

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