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Up from the Libertarian Party: the Houston Convention

by Murray N. Rothbard

The Republican convention at Houston was a delight for me, and for many reasons. For one thing, it was the first major party convention I had ever attended; before that, I had faithfully attended every national Libertarian Party convention (they are held biennially) from 1975 to 1989, as well as countless state LP conventions in between. Not only was the Republican shindig a delight, it was especially so in

The Republican convention at Houston was a delight.

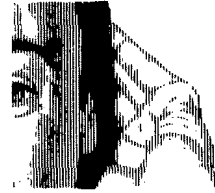
contrast to innumerable Libertarian gatherings of the past.

In the first place, Lew Rockwell and I had a front seat, in every respect, due to the good offices of dynamic young George O'Neill, chairman of the board of the Rockford Institute. George edited the daily editions of Phyllis Schlafly's Republican National Coalition for Life newsletter, and so our headquarters for the convention week was the RNC-Life headquarters.

In contrast to the wimpy Bush organization, the Schlaflyites,

bless them!, are not shy about "negative campaigning" against corruption and evil, and so it was a pleasure for Lew and me to consult with Phyllis Schlafly on the evils of Hillary. In contrast to all too many groups on the Right, Schlafly's two organizations—RNC-Life and the anti-feminist Eagle Forum—have *real* members; they are not just letterheads with computerized mailing-lists, machines for generating money for the organizers. On the contrary, these two organizations have, between them, 200,000 real live and brilliantly organized members, members who are active from the local chapter to the national level.

The Schlaflyite ladies were themselves magnificently pre-feminist: that is, they were amiable and pleasant as well as efficient and hard-working. The contrast to the



THE EAR

by Sarah Barton

I'm on leave this month for something much more important than gossip—hard as all you Earians will find that to believe—having a grandbaby! ■

shrieking hippiesh harridans of the pro-abortion groups was striking.

The place to be at these conventions is not on the actual floor—where we had seats for Pat Buchanan's great Monday night talk—but at the round of "power" cocktail parties, which Lew and I attended due, once again, to George O'Neill. At the parties, I met the leading Right-wing pols and activists, as well as old Right-wing friends and acquaintances I hadn't seen since I was a Right-wing youth,

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 e.g. George Will, who recalled that in 1971 he was in his room at Oxford reading my alleged attack on Bruno Leoni for not wanting to privatize lighthouses (not true, George, I was never the lighthouse fanatic depicted by Buckley).

I also saw my old friend John O'Sullivan at no less than two of these parties (one which he himself hosted for *National Review*). John is apt to pop up at a power cocktail party anywhere on the civilized globe; in fact, on the Right, John's presence almost defines the power nature of a party.

Also met Michael Kinsley at the *National Review* party. When he heard my name, he grinned and exclaimed: "Why you're the Grand Old Man responsible for all this!" and he waved his hand around the room.

At the Pete DuPont reception, I had a nice talk with him about Austrian economics, and at the same party, paleolibertarian Terry Considine, Republican nominee for the U.S. Senate from Colorado against Injun Ben Campbell, exclaimed: "Murray Rothbard! It's your ideas I've been trying to put into practice."

At a lunch, Lew and I met the young leaders of Operation Rescue, who had just had a confrontation with the authorities for praying less than 100 feet from an abortion clinic in defiance of a court order. Their intensity, along with their living a life continually skirting martyrdom, reminded me of the college students of the New Left a generation ago, although it goes without saying that the

Operation Rescue people were the soul of clean-cut morality in stark contrast to the orgiastic counter-culture of the New Left.

Afterwards, I ruminated on how great it was to have left the LP and rejoined the Right. In the first place, of course, one sensed that the Republican convention was a bit more important than the LP convention: a return to the real world at last! Also, the Republicans, for all their faults, were real people, with real jobs in the real world, in contrast to the aging hippies and ex-college

students who people the libertarian movement and float from place to place with no jobs and no roots.

At the Republican parties, the people dressed better, and the food and drinks were a lot better, than at the LP functions. (I still remember a typical state LP convention where the official "dinner" consisted of a few crummy hors d'oeuvres while in the line for cheap wine, and the horror of realizing that none of these turkeys *thought there was anything amiss!*)

All in all, a far better class of people at Republican functions! Even the Republican crooks are crooks on a far grander and imaginative scale than the petty racketeers who abound in the LP.

More important was the realization that I personally got far more respect from the Republicans than I ever got from Libertarians. Oh sure, I

was originally adulated by LPers as one of the few scholars in the party, but as soon as I launched any criticisms of strategy and tactics—as soon as I stepped down from being an icon and actually engaged in discussion or joined one faction or another—then all that disappeared quickly. In short, in contrast to Libertarians, conservatives don't insist on agreement

on every aspect of life. They are willing to focus on agreement rather than disagreement, and generally to act as civilized people. That was something Libertarians, whose party is akin to a cult that brooks no criticism, could never do.

The same is all the more true of the wonderful paleoconservative scholars I've met since we split the libertarians and formed the paleolibertarian movement. It is a pleasure to meet brilliant, erudite, and principled scholars who *don't*, like most Libertarians, spend their time trying to argue with you on every conceivable topic on which you might disagree.

As a result, we and the paleocons have actually had the happy experience of learning from

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each other, and of growing together, or fusing into one paleo movement as swiftly and easily as by osmosis.

When we first formed the paleo alliance, we had the idea of writing a book, presenting "two sides," the libertarian and conservative, of each of a number of key issues, and then trying to arrive at a synthesis at the end of the book. But we all realized after only a few months of interchange, that the idea was obsolete. While of course there are inevitably nuanced differences among individuals, we suddenly realized that we were all on one side, all paleos together. It was a pleasure to find at last, that the old idea of a "community of scholars" who learn from each other and agree on truths is not just a dead cliché of universities but can actually be a living reality.

Recently, a veteran LP leader wrote to a friend, remembering that I had persuaded his generation, in my "Listen, YAF" article in 1969, to leave the conservative movement and to form a self-conscious libertarian movement. He notes wistfully that now I have apparently changed my mind.

I'll try one more time. The last few years have seen one of the most momentous events of the 20th century: the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union and therefore of the Cold War. My Old Right opposition to "perpetual war for perpetual peace" was always my prime reason for separation, a reason I never tried to conceal. The problem is that, with a few exceptions, modern libertarians have never cared tuppence about

foreign policy, about war and peace. Hence, the general confusion among libertarians about my seeming change of heart.

A change in fundamental conditions often calls for a change in basic strategy. There's a new world out there, fellas, and it would be very odd if a radical transformation would *not* cause libertarians, as they should lead Americans, to rethink their foreign policy as well as their place in the ideological universe. The Right is no longer the pro-war monolith it had been since the late 1950s; there are many elements, especially the paleos, who are seeking to return to the spirit of

the Old, pre-Buckley Right. That's what it's all about, Alfie; there's a new world out there. It's time to put aside your *Atlas Shrugged*s and come out and explore it. ■

The New York Times, Communism, and South Africa

by M. N. R.

It would of course, be absurd to call the *New York Times* in any sense pro-Communist. Absurd. Ridiculous. Daft. Surely not the



*Murray N. Rothbard and Phyllis Schlafly
at the Republican National Convention in Houston.*