Farewell To The Left

Now that Spring has arrived, the Left is on the move again, but where is it going, and how is it trying to get there? After five months of torpor, the anti-war demonstrations on April 15 were a feeble shadow of last November, and the fragmented crowds seemed more interested in the irrelevant problem of the Black Panthers than in opposing the expanding war in Southeast Asia. Concentrating on the Panthers not only deflects support and attention from the anti-war cause; it also focuses efforts on purely legal defense instead of opposition to the government’s war policies.

And there is another consideration. Too many in our movement are willing to sacrifice truth and the making of vital distinctions on the altar of political “unity” with our supposed allies. It is true that the police murder of Panthers Hampton and Clark in Chicago last December was unconscionable. It is also true that a systematic campaign to destroy the Panthers by all levels of government seems to be underway. But we must also distinguish the New York trial of the Panthers from the Hampton-Clark murder and the Chicago trial of the Conspiracy 7. For the Panthers in New York are charged, not with dissenting speech as was the Conspiracy, but with a conspiracy to bomb department stores—an undisputed criminal offense. The fact that their excruciating high bail discriminates against the poor and serves to imprison the Panthers before conviction is true and deplorable. But it is also true that those particular Panthers might well be a group of criminals and therefore deserving of no support whatever from anyone claiming to be a libertarian.

In recent months, in fact, there has been an increasingly dominant tendency on the Left—apart from the nefarious bombings—to engage in wanton violence against property that is indisputably private. The latest tactic of the Left is “trashing”—the indiscriminate breaking of windows on houses, buildings, cars. Trashing may be psychologically satisfying to those who enjoy acts of destruction; but what is the meaning and purpose of trashing? What but an indiscriminate assault on private property, and therefore on the concept of private property itself?

In the days of the New Left, of for example the Berkeley, Columbia, San Francisco State and Peoples Park struggles, their assault was against property that was either clearly governmental, or was governmental down deep (such as Columbia). It was then possible for libertarians to support such people’s campaigns against State and State-created property. But the current, or Newest Left, shows so interest in any such distinctions; it seems to be against all property period, and especially property that is private. Take, for example, last year’s seizure of a small, undeniably private, and non-governmental Spanish church in East Harlem by a Puerto Rican gang called the Young Lords. The Young Lords seized the church by force and violence, and demanded the “right” to use the church premises to feed and indoctrinate the public, all in the name of calling themselves “the community” and “the people”. As if the congregation that owns the Church is not just as much a part of “the people” as this youth gang! Being anti-Christian, furthermore, the Young Lords could only see the Church space as remaining “unused”, since religious services cannot qualify as legitimate “use”.

The shocking point about this hooligan action was not so much the act itself, but the response on the part of New Yorkers. The entire Liberal community reacted by lavishing praise upon the Young Lords, and it chastised the church for not being responsive to the “needs of the people”. Not one word was devoted to attacking this deed as aggression against private property. Even the libertarian movement in New York was strangely silent.

Recently, hooliganesses of the Women’s Liberation Movement seized the offices of Grove Press, and issued numerous “demands”. One particularly revealing demand was the call upon Grove Press to stop printing “dirty books” which “degrade women”. Once again, Women’s Lib shows itself to be a twisted 20th-century reincarnation of Puritanism, of the old harridan Carrie Nation destroying bars and saloons with her ax. But the point is that once again the Left, almost automatically, employed violence—not against government property, or quasi-government property, or against the police—but against property that is indisputably private. Fortunately, Grove Press did not answer in the spineless manner of John Mack Carter, editor of the Ladies’ Home Journal, to a similar recent invasion. Instead of defending his office, Carter spoke to those intruders for 11 hours, and wound up paying them to put out a women’s lit supplement of the Journal. Grove Press called in the police to carry those female invaders out, and proceeded to charge them with criminal trespass. Crime is crime, and must be put down with due and proper firmness; otherwise, appeasement of the criminal aggressor will only encourage his (or her) voraciousness for further aggression. As libertarians, and as people, we want a non-aggressive world; and to achieve this we must reinforce the general reluctance to commit crime by apprehending and punishing the criminal. But, it might be asked, isn’t it a terrible thing to call in the State police for self-defense? Certainly not. While no (Continued on page 2)
libertarian enjoys calling upon the State for defense, the fact remains that the State has arrogated to itself a compulsory monopoly of the function of police protection. In such a situation, the State police are the only ones we can call upon for defense. Who among us, set upon by a gang of muggers, would fail to call for the police if we could? But the defense of property against Left hooligans differs not one iota from its defense against non-political muggers. To say that calling in the police for defense against crime is immoral is also to say that walking on the streets is immoral or flying the national flag is immoral, because these are all, unfortunately, monopolized or subsidized by government. If it is moral to use the monopoly Post Office, it is equally moral to use the services of the State police to aid in one’s defense against crime. For while the State is the major criminal organization in our society, it is by no means the only one.

And it is not only the current means employed by the Left that I am attacking; it is their new-found ends as well. Of what relevance to libertarianism, for example, are the demands of the Women’s Liberationists? In what way is it “libertarian” to foist their perverted values upon the general culture and upon society? In what way is it libertarian to agitate for black studies institutes, or for a 5% raise for cafeteria workers? In what way is it libertarian in any sense to call for unspent billion dollars of tax money to “beautify” the environment? Let us take, for example, the current demands of the student rebels and contrast them to the student rebellions of 1968 and 1969. The major 1968 demand at Columbia, the main purpose in view, was evidently libertarian: the divesting of Columbia from support of the American war machine. The 1968-69 student demand at Fordham was similar: to divest Fordham of the mercenaries of ROTC. But what are the current demands among a letter is immoral, because these are all, unfortunately, monopolized or subsidized by government. If it is moral to use the monopoly Post Office, it is equally moral to use the services of the State police to aid in one’s defense against crime. For while the State is the major criminal organization in our society, it is by no means the only one.

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One tragedy in this whole affair is that many of the libertarians of New York, New England, and Washington, D. C. have completely forgotten the crucial strategic principle of Lenin: that, in associating with other groups, one must remain firm and steadfast in one’s principles, while remaining open and flexible in one’s tactics, in ever-changing institutional conditions. The original idea in allying ourselves with the New Left was to work with a new generation permeated with strong libertarian elements. Now that the New Left has died, and its genuine libertarian elements have disappeared, objective conditions require that we make a tactical shift away from the current Left. Instead, too many of our young East Coast libertarians have done just the opposite: agree to strategic advice that they cling as a vital principle to the mere tactic of alliance with the Left; and they abandon their original principles (free-market, private property rights) that led them to becoming libertarians, and therefore into making tactical alliances in the first place. They have placed their very libertarian principles in the category of a disposable tactic, while they raise to the status of a mighty principle a mere tactical alliance. They have tragically allowed the serious changes against the serious trade and the serious life to become an end, and the end to become a mere means.

It was several years ago, I believe, that the brilliant young Marxist historian, Eugene D. Genovese, began denouncing the New Left as “militaristic gangsters.” At the time, I thought he was unfairly traducing a great and hopeful young movement. Now I think he might well have been more prescient, more far-seeing, than the rest of us. Perhaps Genes saw more deeply into the processes of change as they had begun their work. At any rate, “militaristic gangsters” is certainly
have all spoken in terms of "individualism", "self-reliance", beneath the surface. Now that the breach on the Right has if not identical. Rand and Reagan, von their obvious differences, they were really "natural allies" re-examine conscription, libertarians took them to task but still con- alliance was an economic one; both schools identified them- collectivism" as the prime evil afflicting modern society. Theoretically, they appeared to be cut of the same cloth liberal and conservatives alike have denounced "col- sions involving civil, social, moral, and intellectual freedoms as well, we will finally stop regarding ourselves mazing again by a state power that will have been loosed from the restraints of the ages." We hear little talk of this kind from conservatives these days who talk instead of suspending certain liberties until the world is safe from communism.

Murray Rothbard has frequently spoken of the importance of both revolutionary and reformist tactics in the struggle for liberty. While we are organizing our tax rebellions and anti-war protests we might also consider the possibility of turning libertarianism into a major political force in the United States. The Free Democrats of West Germany have served a useful purpose, aligning themselves with whatever party comes closest at the time to their own ideals. The election of civil libertarians to office is useful for the very practical reason that they are less likely than conservatives to use repressive measures in order to crush anti-state activities. If we can stop thinking of libertarianism primarily in economic terms, and consider it instead in its broader aspects involving civil, social, moral, and intellectual freedoms as well, we will finally stop regarding ourselves as a "rational" subdivision of the Republican Party. Aggrieved libertarians and conservatives are no more "natural allies" than were Lysander Spooner and Edmund Burke. As free enterprise becomes less and less a part of Right Wing economic policy in American, the bond that tied libertarians to the Right grows more and more threadbare. So we find ourselves once again assuming the traditional liberal disposition: intellectuals in opposition to authori- tarian government—the disloyal opposition. As radicals in opposition to the status quo we are, by definition, members of the Radical Left as far as political posture is concerned. As free enterprise becomes less and less a part of Right Wing economic policy in American, the bond that tied libertarians to the Right grows more and more threadbare. So we find ourselves once again assuming the traditional liberal disposition: intellectuals in opposition to authori- tarian government—the disloyal opposition. As radicals in opposition to the status quo we are, by definition, members of the Radical Left as far as political posture is concerned.

As the '70's roll on it will, I think, be on the Left among the Paul Goodmans, Carl Oglesbys, and Norman Mailers that we find our future allies for freedom.

--- Jeromine Tuccille
FAREWELL TO THE LEFT — (Continued from page 2)

what the Left has become. Let us therefore bid them farewell.

I agree with all of Jerry Tuccille’s strictures against conservatives in this issue; but the Left provides us no solace either. The distinguished Leftists he mentions are only a few of the honorable exceptions to the bleak Left-wing landscape.

We must face the hard facts: in the current world, we should think of ourselves as neither Leftists nor Rightists. We are libertarians period, with precious little hope of allies among the organizations of either wing. Since there is there- solace either. The distinguished Leftists he

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for other people but also for ourselves, to build up and add to the noble structure of libertarian theory and scholarship that already exists. There is much work to be done, in developing libertarian theory as well as in spreading the gospel of that theory to those who have not yet heard of it. For those who are looking so desperately for something "to do", here is an enormous task waiting to be done:

We must abandon the range-of-the-moment view so typical of our counter-culture, and we must return to the long-range view of such of our founders as Albert Jay Nock, Nock, writing in an age (the 1930’s and 1940’s) of rock-bottom hope for libertarians, said that he did not despair, because in every age, no matter how benighted, there are always a few, a Remnant, that understands. At the very least, that Remnant will pass the torch of rational libertarianism to future generations. There is a goal which, while limited, has the virtue of being eminently attainable, if we but have the will.

Recommended Reading

Anarcho-capitalism, the idea that the free market can supply police and judicial protection by means of privately competitive agencies, was once only a gleam in the eye of the editor of the Libertarian Forum. In the past, the libertarian French economist Gustave de Monlunari championed the idea in 1848, shocking his mentor Frederic Bastiat with his "extremism"; but Molinari didn’t elaborate the concept, and in later years he partially retreated from it. The American individualist anarchists of the late 19th century, Benjamin R. Tucker and Lysander Spooner, also championed the idea, but again rather sketchily. The major flaw in their proposals was that each juror was supposed to make an ad hoc, on-the-spot decision, without any guidance from a rational, objective Law Code requiring adherence to the rights of person and property.

In the last year or so, however, anarcho-capitalism has come into its own, and there are now available three expositions on how Stateless, privately competitive courts and police forces could work.

One, published last year, is a booklet by Jarret B. Wollstein, Society Without Coercion, available for $1.50 from the Society for Individual Liberty, 800 Hillsboro Drive, Silver Spring, Md. 20902. Another is the booklet by Morris and Linda Tannehill, The Market for Liberty, available for $3.95 from M. G. Tannehill, Box 1383, Lansing, Mich. 48904. And finally, there is an article by David Friedman, one of the most recent converts to anarcho-capitalism, in The New Republic (March 14). The young left as irrational "guerrilla theatre".

Robert Brustein, Revolution as Theatre, The New Republic (March 14). The young left as irrational "guerrilla theatre".

Michael Novak, "Do Students Want Education?", Commonweal (March 13). No, answers Novak, sadly but strongly.

Robert Nisbet, "Subjective Si! Objective No!", New York Times Book Review (April 5), Assailing the anti-objectivity of recent radical "social science".

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