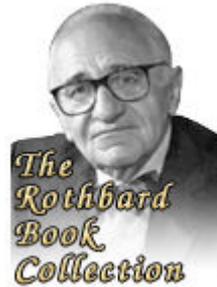


# America's Most Persecuted Minority

by Murray N. Rothbard

Quick: which is America's Most Persecuted Minority? No, you're wrong. (And it's not Big Business either: one of Ayn Rand's more ludicrous pronouncements.)

All right, consider this: Which group has been increasingly illegalized, shamed and denigrated first by the Establishment, and then, following its lead, by society at large? Which group, far from coming *out* of the "closet," has been literally forced back *into* the closet after centuries of walking proudly in the public square? And which group has tragically internalized the value-system of its oppressors, so that they are deeply ashamed and guilty about practicing their rites and customs? Which group is so brow-beaten that it never thinks of defending itself, any attempt at which is publicly condemned and ridiculed? Which group is considered such sinners that the use of doctored statistics against them is considered legitimate means in a worthy cause?



I refer, of course, to that once proud race, tobacco-smokers, a group once revered and envied, but now there are none so poor as to do them reverence.

So low has this group sunk in the public esteem that, in rushing to their defense, I am obliged to point out that I myself am not and never have been a smoker. Can you imagine having to put in such a disclaimer against special pleading in behalf of the rights of blacks, Jews, or gays against oppression?

The crusade against smoking is only the currently most virulent example of one of the most malignant forces in American life: left neo-Puritanism. Puritanism was famously defined by my favorite writer, H.L. Mencken, as "the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy." The major problem with the Puritans is not so much that they were a dour lot, but that they were believers in the dangerous Christian heresy of "post-millennialism" that is, that it is man's responsibility to establish a thousand-year (give or take a few

centuries) Kingdom of God on Earth as a precondition of the Second Advent of Jesus Christ. Since the Kingdom is by definition a perfect society free of sin, this means that it is the theological duty of believers to establish a sin-free society. But establishing a sin-free society, of course, means taking stern measures to get rid of sinners, which is where the rub comes in.

Now I recognize that in being obliged to depict the crusaders as neo-Puritans, I am in a deep sense not doing justice to the original Puritans. The original seventeenth-century New England Puritans were not so much crusaders as people who wanted to establish their own sin-free Kingdom in their own new settlements, their own "city on a hill." The original Puritans, too, were Calvinists, who believed in Christianity and a Christian commonwealth as a strict code of Biblical and God-determined law. But over the years, the original Puritanism was replaced, especially by a wave of pietist revivalism in the late 1820s, by a far more crusading and hence menacing version of Protestant Christianity: what is technically known as "post-millennial evangelical pietism" (PMEP). This PMEP took particular root among the ethno-cultural descendants of the old Puritans, people who became known as "Yankees," and who had migrated from New England to populate such areas as upstate New York, northern and eastern Ohio, northern Indiana, and northern Illinois. (No, "Yankees," as in "damn Yankees," did not mean simply "Northerners.")

This new, and malignant, form of PMEP, of neo-Puritanism, which literally dominated all the mainstream Protestant churches in the North for literally one hundred years, had the following traits: (1) Creed, or liturgy, is formalistic and unimportant. So long as you are a Protestant, it doesn't matter what church you belong to. Churches don't matter; the only thing that matters is the individual's salvation. (2) To achieve salvation, the individual must believe and must be free from sin. (3) "Sin," however, is very broadly defined as virtually any practice that is enjoyable, in particular, anything which might "cloud your mind" so that you might not achieve salvation: in particular, liquor (Demon Rum); any activity on the Sabbath except praying, reading the Bible, and going to church (and not the Roman Catholic Church, the instrument of the Antichrist in the Vatican); (4) Since each individual is weak and subject to temptation, his salvation must be aided by the government, whose theological duty it is to stamp out such occasions for sin as liquor, activity of any secular sort on the Sabbath, and the Catholic Church. As one historian aptly summed up the PMEP attitude toward the State: "Government is God's major instrument of salvation." After all, how are liquor or Catholics to be stamped out by persuasion alone? (5) (the crucial icing on the cake): *You* will not be saved unless you try your darndest to maximize everyone else's salvation (i.e., get the government to stamp out sin).

Armed with this five-point world-outlook, the neo-Puritan PMEP hurled himself (and *herself*, and how!) into a devilishly energetic, hopped-up, unrelenting crusade to stamp out these evils, and to set up paternalistic Big Government on the local, state, and national levels to crush sin and to usher in a perfect sin-less Kingdom. In politics, this

meant a full century of crusading against liquor, and to keep the Sabbath Holy. (Do you know that in libertarian, anti-neo-Puritan Jacksonian America, the Post Office used to deliver the mail on Sundays?) But since it would be clearly unconstitutional to outlaw the Catholic Church, the PMEP substitute was to try to force all children into a network of public schools, the object of which was to inculcate obedience to the State *and*, in the popular slogan of the day, to "Christianize the Catholic" kids, since Catholic adults were clearly doomed.

It took archetypical neo-Puritan Woodrow Wilson not only to bring Prohibition to America, and thereby fulfill the PMEP's most cherished dreams, but also to take PMEP crusading on to a world scale. For after the Kingdom was established in America, the next holy step was to bring about a worldwide Kingdom. (The Prohibitionist crusaders, however, soon found their dreams of a liquor-free Europe dashed beyond repair.)

The ethno-religious group that felt the most severe oppression from the fanatical harridans of the PMEP (for yes, the most fanatic crusaders were Yankee women, especially spinsters) were the German-American Catholics and High-Church Lutherans. Both of these groups imported into America the charming and admirable custom of going to church on Sundays with their family in their best finery, and then repairing to a beer garden in the afternoon, where they could drink beer and listen to their beloved oom-pah-pah bands. You can imagine the reaction when hordes of PMEP harridans descended upon them crying "Sin! Evil! Smash!" for committing what to the Germans was harmless, but what to the PMEPs was the grave *double* sin of drinking beer, *and on Sundays!* And, furthermore, both the Catholics and the German Lutherans wanted to bring up their kids in their own parochial schools, and not in the secularist (or rather, PMEP) public school system!

The high-water mark of PMEP crusading was, of course, the outlawing of all liquor (and by constitutional amendment, no less!). The result used to be common knowledge in America; absolute disaster: tyranny, corruption, black markets and *more* alcoholism as people went underground to get more intense "fixes" such as hard liquor rather than beer before the cops could close in. And, of course, organized crime, which was almost non-existent before Prohibition. But now, only groups willing to be criminals were available to supply a much desired and demanded product.

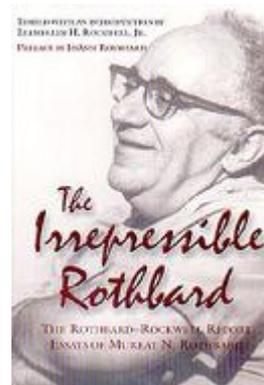
This grim lesson used to be known to all Americans, but it has been lost in the enthusiasm for recent neo-Puritan crusades; against drugs, and now against smoking. What is little realized is that the current reason for the crusade was also present during the old PMEP war against liquor. As the decades wore on, the neo-Puritans used *both* theological and medicinal arguments; liquor will not only send you to Hell, but would also ruin your temporal body, your liver, your body-as-a-temple. Liquor would cause you to beat your wives, have more accidents, and, a little later, injure yourself and others on the road.

Increasingly, over the years, the PMEPs married theology and Science in their crusade.

So what happened to the aggressively Christian features of neo-Puritanism, to the emphasis on salvation and on the Kingdom? Interestingly, over the decades, the Christian aspect gradually disappeared. After all, if *as a Christian activist*, your major focus is not on creed or liturgy but on using the government to shape everyone up and stamp out sin, eventually Christ fades out of the picture and government remains. The picture of the Kingdom of God on Earth becomes secularized or atheized, and, in the Marxist version, the secular sin-free Kingdom is brought about by the terrible swift sword of the "saints" of the Communist Party. We have arrived at the grisly land of Left Puritanism, of a Left Kingdom which proposes to bring about a perfect world free of tobacco, inequality, greed, and hate-thoughts. We have arrived, in short, in the land of The Enemy.

And so, smokers! Are you mice or are you men? Smokers, rise up, be proud, throw off the guilt imposed on you by your oppressors! Stand tall, and smoke! Defend your rights! Do you *really* think that someone can get instant lung cancer by imbibing a bit of smoke from someone sitting twenty feet away in an outdoor arena? How do you explain the fact that millions of people have smoked all their lives without ill effect?

And remember, if today they come for the smoker, tomorrow they will come for you. If today they grab your cigarette, tomorrow they will seize your junk food, your carbohydrates, your yummy but "empty" calories. And don't think that your liquor is safe either; neo-Prohibitionism has been long on the march, what with "sin taxes" (revealing term, isn't it?), outlawing of advertising, higher drinking ages, and the neo-Puritan harpies of MADD. Are you ready for the Left Nutritional Kingdom, with everyone forced to confine his food to yogurt and tofu and bean sprouts? Are you ready to be confined in a cage, to make sure that your diet is perfect, and that you get the prescribed Compulsory Exercise? All to be governed by a Hillary Clinton National Health Board?



Smokers, if you have the guts to form a Smokers Defense League, I will be happy to join a Non-Smokers Auxiliary! How about smokers as one important mass base for a right-wing populist counterrevolution?